States and Societies in East Central Europe

Contributions to Modern Political Thought

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The Crisis of Modernity: Karel Kosík's Essays and Observations from the 1968 Era
by Karel Kosík; edited by James H. Satterwhite

THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY

ESSAYS AND OBSERVATIONS FROM THE 1968 ERA

KAREL KOSÍK

EDITED BY JAMES H. SATTERWHITE

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STATES AND SOCIETIES IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

CONTRIBUTIONS TO MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

This publication series, prepared under the auspices of the William O. Douglas Institute, consists of critically annotated texts translated from the major languages of East-Central Europe. These texts are all significant modern works in political and social thought, chosen to illuminate the character of the societies of the region, the processes of change in those countries, their distinctive intellectual concerns, and the relationship of such concerns with the intellectual currents of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the rest of Europe and elsewhere.

The aim of the series is, by making these works accessible to English-speaking students, scholars, and the interested public, to render the recent and contemporary history of East-Central Europe more readily understandable. Each volume will include, besides the translated work or collection of essays, an interpretive introductory essay, and critical textual annotation.

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PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

The hastily written articles that came out in the Spring of 1968 in the newspaper *Literární noviny* entitled "Our Present Crisis," those which form the core of this collection, aroused considerable interest in the Czech public at that time—although they also provoked criticism, of course. Polemical articles appeared, with titles such as "Your Present Crisis" or "Their Present Crisis." These articles contained many valid objections and comments, but none of the benevolent critics of those days noticed that the title of this series of articles was a clear allusion to T. G. Masaryk's famous work from 1895. The central thought of that work was the claim that the main Czech political party of the time—the Young Czechs—had exhausted their political possibilities, and that their place must now be taken by a new political force. With the passage of time it has become utterly clear that my critique of the ruling Communist party and its monopoly of power had arrived at the same conclusions, and that further developments have only served to confirm this analysis. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, malicious and slanderous critics appeared in the place of serious critics and, returning to my articles, labeled them a "counterrevolutionary pamphlet." What inflamed them most of all was the prophetic declaration in the sixth article of the series that the "revolutionary possibilities" in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe were "far from exhausted."

As a historical document this collection serves primarily as a reminder that in the Czech society of the 1960s a current existed that was weak and not very effective, but conspicuous nonetheless. Those in this current were working toward reform, but they harbored absolutely no illusions about the ideology of the so-called scientific and technological revolution, and they sharply and unambiguously condemned the political monopoly of the ruling party as the source of complete demoralization. In August 1968 they loudly and publicly rejected the military assault on Czechoslovakia.

For the American reader, those places in the articles that talk about the connection between the local Czech crisis of the 1960s and the general crisis of

our world today should offer food for thought. If it is true that the crisis of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is merely a manifestation of the crisis of the entire modern age, a crisis of subjectivism let loose, then conclusions about the situation in Central Europe apply to other countries as well, and affect them equally. This should remind American readers that "we are talking about you, too."

Karel Kosík
Prague, October 1990

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Czech philosopher Karel Kosík is known to an English-speaking audience primarily through his book *Dialectics of the Concrete*. That book is recognized by those versed in Marxist thought as a significant contribution to the ongoing scholarship working to relate Marx's ideas to the contemporary world. Those who have studied Eastern Europe acknowledge the important role the book played during the Czechoslovak "Prague Spring" reform movement of the 1960s.[1] What is less known is the extent to which Kosík was active in that reform movement in other ways, and what place his other writing had in that movement. For an English-speaking readership most of this other work has been inaccessible, with the exception of a few short articles or excerpts translated over the years. Even for those who read Czech, it was a major undertaking to track down all of his articles. This volume thus fulfills a twofold task, bringing together a number of Kosík's most important pieces and making them available in English. The bibliography also shows us where they originally appeared. The articles that appear in this collection are important not only because they represent work that before now was relatively unknown outside of Czechoslovakia, but because most of them are precisely those articles that had such an influence on the Prague Spring movement. The very name given to the collection reflects this fact. Kosík himself begins one of the articles, "Socialism and the Crisis of Modern Man," by saying that the events in Czechoslovakia at that time could best be described by the terms "crisis" and "humanist socialism." These writings represent Kosík's response to that crisis as it developed in the 1960s, a response that was informed by the socialist humanism to which he refers in this statement. The significance of Kosík's ideas, however, transcends the particular context of Czechoslovakia of the 1960s, or even Eastern Europe as a whole.

Karel Kosík was born in Prague in 1926. As a student during World War Two he participated in the resistance movement against the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, and was imprisoned by the Gestapo for these activities. At the end of the war he finished his studies in philosophy, first at Leningrad

University in the Soviet Union, then at Charles University in Prague. He published his first book, *Czech Radical Democracy*, in 1958. This book was a study of the radical democrats of the nineteenth century in Czechoslovakia and was meant to show that they had made an important contribution—even though they were not Marxists—to the development of a critical national consciousness in the Czech lands at that time. He worked as a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences until 1963, when he was made professor of philosophy at Charles University. During this time Kosík was active in other ways as well: he was director of the Union of Czech Writers, on the editorial committee of the Union's weekly newspaper, *Literární noviny* (*Literary News*), and in 1968 was named editor-in-chief of the monhly journal *Plamen* (*Flame*);the articles in this collection are taken from both of these journals. He also served on the editorial board of the Yugoslav journal *Praxis*, which in its dual Yugoslav and international editions served as an outlet for much of the creative work going on in Marxist thought—both Eastern and Western—during this time.

Kosík gave a talk at the Fourth Congress of Czechoslovak Writers in 1967 entitled "Reason and Conscience," which was a call to the writers to remain true to themselves and their vocation of critical thinking, and which—along with other such talks—would help set the stage for the reform movement of the following year, the Prague Spring. He continued to write articles for *Literární noviny* during 1968 in support of the reform, and participated as a delegate in the clandestine Fourteenth Congress of the Czech Communist party which met in the days after the Soviet invasion of August 1968. At this Congress he was elected a member of the Central Committee of the party, but because he refused to go along with the process of "normalization" (the euphemism used by the Soviets to mean a return to the prereform period) he was expelled from the party and from all of his official duties, and also prevented from doing any further teaching or publishing. All of his writings were removed from bookstores and libraries, and the police even confiscated his research notes for a time, although they eventually returned them following an international protest led by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. He was prevented from doing all but the most menial work, and was banned from publishing because of the fact that the government considered him to have a potentially dangerous influence.[2]

The years 1956–68 witnessed a revival of creative activity in all spheres of life in Czechoslovakia, most notable in the sphere of art and culture. Art was breaking away from the hitherto prevailing theory of "socialist realism," in which it was expected to serve an edifying function, and was beginning to explore new modes of creativity. The task of giving theoretical expression to this revival of creativity in art and culture was aided by the emergence of a new understanding within Marxist philosophy of man and his creative role in

the world—an understanding that was exceptionally well represented by the philosopher Karel Kosík.

The year 1956 was of particular importance, not only in Czechoslovakia but for all of the countries of Eastern Europe. Stalin had died three years earlier, and in 1956 Nikita Khrushchev came out at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist party of the Soviet Union with his denunciations of Stalin and Stalinism. This had the effect of giving further momentum to a trend that had begun in part at the death of Stalin—that of disorientation, and of the questioning of basic assumptions about life. Khrushchev's speeches sent a shock wave rippling throughout Eastern Europe, undermining the trust of many people in what they had been led to believe about the world. This shock was less immediately felt or visible in Czechoslovakia, as compared to how it registered in Poland or Hungary, for instance, but it did have the effect of eroding the foundation of the Stalinist order even there. This erosion first revealed itself in the questioning that began to take place in regard to many of the manifestations of the Stalinist era.

The revelation in 1963 that the Slanský trials were not what they had been represented to be is what most undermined belief in the Communist party, and in the system as a whole as it was then constituted.[3] These had been staged "show trials," similar to those that had taken place in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, in which high Communist officials had been "implicated" in plots against the state and subsequently executed. The trials had antisemitic overtones, and when it came out that they had been manipulated it was a severe shock to the whole society, particularly to those intellectuals who had had implicit faith in the rightness of the system. In the legal profession these revelations about the trials prompted a rethinking of the problem of the nature and role of law in a socialist society, whereas demands were heard from the philosophers for more room in which to carry on their activity.[4] With this erosion of the most basically believed values an undercurrent of searching for new, more authentic values began. In Czechoslovakia this search was not manifested outwardly as it was in Poland or Hungary, but began quietly. In Hungary the changes that came about after Stalin's death in 1953, coupled with the nature of the holdover Stalinist regime, led to the explosion of the "Hungarian Revolution" of November 1956. In Poland the demands for change that had also been building since 1953 almost led to a similar phenomenon, but the pressures for change were vented by the accession to power of a new leader, Władisław Gomułka, who seemed at the time to represent a reform platform, even though this impression was subsequently not borne out.

In Czechoslovakia the search took the form of a desire to gain more flexibility in everyday endeavors. This meant less control by the party over the details of everyday work and over the first tentative attempts to redefine social

life. This searching was cautious out of necessity, because the party still retained firm control in Czechoslovakia, and was anxious not to participate in the "de-Stalinization" campaign any more than it had to, lest it destroy its own authority in the process. So, the party resisted any and all questioning of its position, and was extremely reluctant to give up any part of its prerogatives in any sphere. In fact, in Czechoslovakia the reaction to the events of 1956 in Hungary and Poland was to make the leaders even more resistant to change, and even less inclined to implement any new policies related to the de-Stalinization process set off by Khrushchev's speeches. The Czech Communist party newspaper, *Rudé Pravo*, even printed an editorial on January 29, 1957, which said that "the ambiguous word 'de-Stalinization' stands only for the idea of weakening and giving way to the forces of reaction. . . ."[5] In November 1957, Antonin Novotný, who had been the head of the party since 1953, assumed the post of president as well, thus further consolidating power and resistance to change within the party. Nevertheless, the shock wave set off by Khrushchev's speeches had done its damage, and the questioning process that had begun could not be halted. One commentator has said that "1963 was the most important year in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1968; it was a year in which all the political, ideological, intellectual, and economic problems suddenly escalated and escaped the control of Novotny's regime."[6]

The crisis that unfolded in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s was a twofold crisis, both economic and political. Economically the country was faced with a decline which by the mid-1960s had reached very grave proportions. Czechoslovakia in the interwar period had been one of the most advanced industrial countries in Europe, but under the centrally planned "command economy" model that had been instituted after 1948 this advanced position had given way to a severely deteriorating situation. Attempts to formulate a solution to the dilemma in the economic sphere gave rise to the impetus for political reform that grew up within the Communist party. This move toward reform was very slow, and came from below, inasmuch as those at the top of the party—led by First Secretary Antonin Novotný—were extremely resistant to change. The efforts to bring about change in Czechoslovakia were ultimately successful, though for a only brief period, because the crises in the economic and cultural spheres converged with a political crisis within the party. What happened in 1968 was new only in the way in which it brought together ideas that had already been developed in the preceding years.

The first open challenge to the Novotný regime came from the Congress of the Slovak Writers' Union in Bratislava on April 22, 1963. This was partly a result of the fact the Slovaks had suffered disproportionately under Stalinism because their desire for more autonomy was labeled "bourgeois nationalism," so their reaction "took the form of a revival of Slovak nationalism and protest against the vestiges of Stalinism still alive in Czechoslovakia."[7] The challenge continued at the May 22 meeting of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, where

the delegates in a sense picked up where they had left off in 1956. The Slovak poet Laco Novomeský, who—along with Gustav Husák (who was to assume leadership of the party after Alexander Dubček was ousted in 1969)—had been denounced as a nationalist in 1950, spoke at both the Bratislava and Prague conferences. In Prague he gave a speech where he said that the "tragedy of the whole situation [was] that we misled and confused a whole generation. . . . To this generation we must return confidence, trust, and truth; however, we must find them in ourselves first."[8] On May 27 and 28 the Congress of the Slovak Journalists' Union, meeting in Bratislava, further challenged the party on its cultural policy. The Czechoslovak Writers' Union was to play a crucial role in the reform efforts again a few years later, at its meeting in June 1967.

At the same time, another important development was taking place in the sphere of economics:

> From the late fifties, the increasingly disastrous state of the economy . . . which culminated in an unprecedented crisis in 1963, had given rise to decentralizing proposals. These ideas, following Soviet leads, culminated in the elaboration of the New Economic System, or Model, by a team led by Professor Ota Šik. The System was accepted officially in 1965, and introduced at the beginning of 1967. . . . What was important about the introduction of the New Economic System . . . was that it made an ideological and practical breach in the wall of Novotny's neo-Stalinist model.[9]

The movement for economic and political reform coincided with a wider movement for change in the artistic and cultural realms as well, as an increasing number of challenges were heard in the realm of culture. In the sphere of art and culture, the guidelines of "socialist realism" were being more and more loosely interpreted under the pressure from artists who were uncomfortable with the strict style which had been required of them, and who wanted to be free to create as they chose. Part of this discontent focused on the demand made by "socialist realism" that art play a socially edifying role in building up the character of the new socialist society. "Socialist realism" first began in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, but originally represented only a variant of the age-old idea that art should in some sense help to serve some socially useful purpose. Gradually this changed, so that the term came to mean simply that art should serve the party unconditionally. The result was that a crude realism was enforced in art whose purpose was to glorify the system and to try to make people over into the "new socialist man." As early as 1956 and 1957 a series of debates took place in the newspaper *Literární noviny* on philosophy and culture, in which Kosík played a prominent role. These articles attracted a good deal of public attention, and were instrumental in raising public awareness of some of the questions being asked in intellectual circles, and in bringing some of the issues of the day out into the open.[10]

Still, the process of rethinking that was going on was a very gradual one,

and was accomplished only in stages through the period after 1956. As time passed and more and more people became involved in this process it became clear that philosophy had a major role to play in providing a coherent expression for the often inchoate strivings in all areas of society, especially in the artistic and cultural sphere. Kosík began with a study of the Czech Radical Democrats of the nineteenth century, and attempted to find in them a clue to understanding something of the nature of Czech culture. He then went on to draw on virtually all modern currents of philosophy in an attempt to create a synthesis and a new understanding based on this.[11] This work, entitled *Dialektika konkrétního* (*The Dialectics of the Concrete*),came out in 1963, drawing on several papers which Kosík had presented at various philosophical conferences through the preceding years. The book was of great significance, as it drew on the different currents of philosophical thought, yet transformed them into something genuinely new, and something that was authentically Marxist as well. In *Dialectics of the Concrete* Kosík followed the pattern set by all serious West European Marxist scholars, as well as those in Eastern Europe who were committed to a serious study of Marx—as opposed to mere apologetics—and drew on the main currents of European thought, such as existentialism and phenomenology, in this thinking.

Also he, as any of the above type of thinker, could not have failed to take into account the writings of György Lukács as part of the intellectual heritage of twentieth-century Marxism. (Lukács was the Hungarian Marxist writer whose work *History and Class-Consciousness*, first published in 1923, represented a breakthrough in Marxist thought by its rediscovery of many of the Hegelian influences on Marx's thinking.) Kosík most certainly would have been familiar with the work of those of his contemporaries in the field worthy of note—whether from Eastern Europe or the West. This is in particular contrast to the approach taken by Soviet Marxist scholars and those connected with the more orthodox view in Eastern Europe, as these were characterized by their refusal to come to terms with other philosophical currents in any serious or open fashion. Existentialism and phenomenology were of particular significance to Kosík because of the way in which they center on man and his activity.[12] Kosík thus was important in systematically providing a theoretical foundation for this new understanding of man.

The concept of *praxis*, whether explicitly a part of any given work or not, is the key to an understanding of the whole of Marxist humanism, and is certainly the crucial idea for the struggle that was going on between orthodox Marxism-Leninism and the Communist party on the one hand and the proponents of the new Marxist philosophy of man on the other. It is the new way of understanding *praxis* as man's creative mode of living in the world, as the recognition that reality is a *human* reality with man as the *subject*, as well as the object of it that is so fundamentally different from the Marxist-Leninist view of the world. In this new view each person takes on significance and can

take part in the creating of his or her reality, in this case social reality. This approach radically undermines the claim of the party to be the sole agent for interpreting historical necessity, or the "objective laws of history," whereby the party can best understand those historical forces which determine human actions, and for which humans are only objects. Therefore, the very *concept* of "revolutionary human *praxis*" is a revolutionary one not because of the word "revolutionary" but because of the realization that man makes his social reality, and can therefore change it. It is through *praxis* that we arrive at reality because this means that we perceive reality as our product. Nature can be changed and transformed, but social reality can be changed in a revolutionary way because it is a product of man.[13] In neither case is anything meaningful for man unless he makes it a "thing for himself." This entails the realization of truth and the creation of reality, as *every* individual has a part in the creation of his truth, as a sociohistorical being.

The articles represented in this collection are all interrelated, and all of them reflect this theme of *praxis* in one way or another. In "Our Present Crisis" Kosík begins by saying that what is at question is a search for meaning in the life of the society, the nation. In this search the opportunity exists for transforming society and replacing old forms with new, but the danger exists also of not effecting *this* transformation, and merely changing one set of circumstances for another, equally bad.[14] Implicit in this statement is Kosík's central idea, *praxis*, whereby man as the subject as well as the object of his social conditions has the capacity to change those conditions in a radical and revolutionary way. Seen in this context, the article becomes a call to action, and the practical side of the philosophical concept of *praxis*. In his philosophy Kosík has said that man was capable of transforming his society through revolutionary *praxis*—in his article he was calling on people to actually put this theory into "practice."

Kosík again attacked "the leading role of the party" as practiced and understood at that time. "Politicians talk of the 'leading role of the party'," Kosík wrote, "by which they mean . . . the ruling position of a power group."[15] Implicit in these remarks is a radical departure from Lenin's conception of the "leading role of the party." Although the argument could be made that, in fact, Kosík was only calling for a return to "democratic centralism"—the principle enunciated by Lenin in which there is intraparty democracy and discussion until the final decision, but the party must then speak and act with a central, unified voice—his article leads one to question that assumption. He talks about both the "party-masses" and the "non-party masses" as being manipulated by the "power group," and proposes that "instead of the old obsolete alliance of party and non-party members, a new political alliance of communists, socialists, democrats and other citizens might be created. Socialist democracy is either an all-inclusive democracy, or it is not democracy at all.[16] This is something far more than "democratic centralism," even if the party had

been viewed as having only a "guiding" (rather than "leading") function, as some had suggested.[17] Lenin had definite ideas about the role of the party as the vanguard of the proletariat. "Vanguard of the Proletariat" meant originally, in Marx, that part of the working class that was most conscious of its position in society, and thus of the necessity for radical change. Later, especially with Lenin, this term came to mean that the party was destined to play a "leading role" in society, and that it had an infallible ability to do so. This role was, furthermore, necessitated by the political situation in Russia under the czar, where an elite party of revolutionaries was absolutely essential to the success of the revolution, and a mass party was an impossibility.

Also inherent in the call for a new alliance, a new "socialist democracy," was the basic theme of man's creative activity as a subject of his social conditions as well as their object, and therefore of the necessity for other social conditions that would allow man to be creative—hence an end to party interference in philosophy and art, and an end to the theory that their function was to serve the party in its role as edifier of the masses. "Edification" became here "mystification," the creation of a false consciousness, but according to the philosophy formulated by Kosík it was precisely the *nature* of art and philosophy to *de*-mystify, to cut through appearances to the essence of phenomena.[18] This held true for any society, not only the Czechoslovak one, but it grew out of the specific conditions pertaining in that society at that time, and—while transcending this role—constituted an attempt to explain the developments in that society philosophically.

Kosík himself summed up much of the discussion as to the importance of the new philosophy in an interview he had in 1968 with Antonin Liehm, a Czech journalist and film critic. Many themes that found expression in Kosík's writings are mentioned in the course of the interview. In talking about Czechoslovak culture during the period from 1956 to 1968, Kosík had the following to say:

> There is another question which intrigues me; namely, why our culture proved so effective, so vital. There was a definite cross-fertilization between literature, art, and philosophy, so that we can truly speak of culture in the broadest sense of the word. . . . There was a particular cultural "common denominator" which emerged during the last few years and which manifested itself especially clearly in our cinema. . . . The fundamental reality of Czech culture hinged on the question; "What is Man?" That is the political, critical, revolutionary essence. . . . The real fundamental polemic of our culture lay in the fact that against the official—one might say "reigning"—concept of Man, it put forth an entirely different concept of its own.[19]

Kosík goes on to explain what he means by "official" concept of Man. Rather than some explicit doctrine, it is:

> . . . a concept of man implicit in the regime's political, economic, and moral functioning, one which was, at the same time, mass-produced by the regime because it required precisely this sort of human being. . . . In dealing with the question, "What is Man?", culture naturally formulated its answer quite differently. While the official view saw human characteristics in terms of Man's limits, emptiness, simplicity and lack of dynamism, Czech culture emphasized Man as a complex creature, continually alive, elastic, striving to overcome conflicts, a being irreducible to a single dimension.[20]

A number of themes are developed here that figure in several other of the articles. These include the discussion of the nature of modern politics, the meaning of culture, and the "Czech Question."[21] Kosík says that "our present crisis is not just a political crisis, but also a crisis of politics. It asks questions not only about a particular political system, but also, and above all, about the meaning of politics."[22] Here we can see something of the meaning of Kosík's thought that transcends its East European context. He is indeed using that particular confluence of circumstances to make a point about the modern world in general, where the East European experience represents one variation on a theme that is well-nigh universal in today's world.

The characteristic feature of politics in the modern world, according to Kosík, is mass manipulation. "Politics as mass manipulation is possible only in a system of universal manipulation."[23]

> Man is plugged into this system as a manipulated unit: one of the greatest illusions of modern man, one which characterizes the specificity of contemporary false consciousness, is the assumption that it is possible to treat reality (Being) as an object, as something to be exploited, as something that we can control and do with as we wish, and that in spite of all this we ourselves remain *outside* of such an arrangement.[24]

At the heart of this system is the phenomenon of "technical rationality," which regards reality as a system which can be dealt with however we like, a system of "perfectibility and objectivization."[25] Political manipulation is then an expression of this technical rationality in the sphere of human relations, and is based on "an artificially created atmosphere of irrationality: the technique of manipulation presupposes and exploits a permanent state of hysteria, fear and hope."[26] This system of manipulation is what calls into question the whole meaning of politics, per se, in the modern world. It is not confined to one or another political or ideological structure, but is rather endemic in all of them. *This* is what constitutes "our present crisis," the "crisis of politics," because politics as mass manipulation in some sense transforms and undermines the understanding of political activity that we have traditionally held.

This same problem pervades the discussion of all other issues as well. In Kosík's view, the "Czech Question" is really another version of this dilemma. He writes that in Palacký's[27] time the Czech nation was threatened by a worldwide process of centralization, but that now it is threatened instead by the system of universal manipulation, where:

> there is a growing danger that the political nation will be transformed into an apathetic mass, i.e., a mass of residents who have lost the ability and desire to differentiate between truth and falsehood, good and evil, better from worse in their actions, thinking and in their lives as a whole.[28]

The "Czech Question" is, above all, a question of the meaning of human existence, according to Kosík, and as such cannot be reduced to "mere politics, mere nationality, mere patriotism, merely the creation of a state, mere morals or mere culture. . . ."[29] In this regard the "Czech Question" is the same as the political question in general, and the solution to the problem must be sought in the same area. As Kosík sees it, what is needed is an entirely new type of politics, one which in turn comes from a new way of viewing "man and history, nature and time, being and truth." This alternative view of the world, alternative political system, is precisely that of socialist humanism, characterized by *praxis* as its central tenet. Here we can see that Kosík's efforts to contribute to the transformation of Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring movement were simultaneously part and parcel of his vision of what the entire world should be like. Reform in Czechoslovakia or Eastern Europe cannot be separated from the general context of the "crisis of politics" in the modern world as a whole. In this regard Kosík is different from some of his contemporaries in Eastern Europe, who see reform there as simply introducing "Western democracy"; for Kosík this step is incomplete so long as it is not recognized that the problem of political manipulation—the "political illusion," as Jacques Ellul termed it—crosses national and ideological boundaries.[30]

Following the "Velvet Revolution" of 1989 Kosík was reinstated as a professor in the Philosophy Department of Charles University and once more lectured there (in the company of many of the former colleagues who had voted to expel him in the 1960s). The irony of the post-1989 period is that Kosík still had trouble getting published, due to the fact that—as he mentions in the preface to his essay "On Laughter"—his work "does not correspond with the spirit of the times," although a collection of his essays finally did appear in late 1993.[31]

In July of 1992 he was informed that he was again being dismissed, this time due to a "lack of money." (This issue may also have been a factor in his dismissal once again from the university.) Marxist discourse no longer serves

directly as the currency for reform thought in Eastern Europe; for most people now Marxism has become discredited through its use as the official ideology.

This does not mean, however, that the same concerns are not present, nor that the work done by the critical Marxist intellectuals of the 1960s is no longer valid. If the direction of future reform is ever to be toward some kind of social democracy—as Kosík would certainly like to see happen—then the legacy of the Prague Spring is one that cannot be ignored. The Czechs and Slovaks must each search their experience in order to find models that are relevant for the future; in so doing they must also reintegrate their past with their present, and fill in the gaps, the "blank spots," in their history. The contributions of such "revisionist" Marxist thinkers as Kosík remain part of their intellectual heritage, and must be understood as a precondition to further efforts toward reform.

This is especially true now, as the old order has been swept away. The essays in this volume serve both as an example of Kosík's role in the Prague Spring reform movement and, at the same time, as a commentary on the human situation—a commentary that has, if anything, only gained in its validity over the intervening years. It is in this light that they should be read, and it is for this reason that their publication in English is as timely as ever.

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Chapter 1

REASON AND CONSCIENCE

A great Czech intellectual wrote from prison on June 18, 1415: "A theologian said that all will be well with me and all will be permitted to the degree that I obey the Council, and he added, 'If the Council were to declare that you have but one eye, despite the fact you may have two, it is your duty to agree with the Council.' I replied to him: 'Even if the whole world were to affirm that, I, utilizing whatever reason I may possess, could not acknowledge such a thing without a rejection of my conscience.'"[1]

This text is unique in world literature and belongs among those immortal thoughts that reveal basic truths regarding man and the world. We must, accordingly, read it carefully to grasp its meaning and examine it with the utmost care to see what constitutes the fundamental truth within it.

To be fundamental means above all to establish a foundation and once that foundation has been established, to base one's own existence and own justification on it alone. As soon as this base in question is destroyed, diminished, forbidden, or deformed, it loses its own foundation; and anything without a foundation is unstable, shallow, empty. But the basic truth stated by that intellectual from the fifteenth century refers not to a thing, but rather to man—man devoid of basic truth loses his support, loses the ground under his feet, and becomes a rootless, baseless man.

Who is a man without roots, without a foundation? He who has lost reason and conscience, replies the fifteenth-century Czech intellectual. Let's take a good look: reason and conscience exist together, they are a unit, and only as such do they constitute the basis for human existence. Later periods, including our own, know of reason and conscience only as two mutually independent variables, indifferently or antagonistically disposed to one another. In modern times, any kind of fundamental link between reason and conscience is even viewed with suspicion. But dubiousness and suspicion are poor counsel when one is dealing with truth and its problems. On the contrary, we must ask what

the consequences for mankind have been and continue to be of the division between reason and conscience that seems so natural and ever-present today.

Let us return to the text cited earlier: inasmuch as we are the servants of historical fact—since we know how the dispute ended between the Council and the man who did not wish to lose reason and conscience—the hypothetical potential consequences that the text points up completely elude us. In the name of the Council, and as its representative, the theologian offers the intellectual the following alternative: if you agree with the Council that you have but one eye, even though you know yourself to possess two, all will not only be forgiven you, but also permitted you. This second, hypothetical variant is not without its possibilities: it promises that the man will gain everything—all will be allowed him—if he is prepared to renounce something. And who, in the conflict of "everything" with "something," would not choose "all" in exchange for a mere "something"? But above all, in fact, who in a dispute between "real" and "illusory" possibilities would not prefer the former and would not from a realistic point of view criticize the intellectual who chose the second possibility for being an exaggerated radical, a conceited extremist, an incorrigible eccentric? Because reality reasons thus: if they ask me to concede that I have only one eye, although I know that I have two, then it is certain that they are asking something justifiable, beneficial, and useful—in short, something reasonable. What is the voice of conscience as opposed to this voice of adamant reason? In comparison with authoritative and public reason which asks that I concede that I have but one eye, even though I know I have two, the voice of conscience appears as not just a private matter but rather, primarily, as a minuscule and worthless authority; because what is at stake is the encounter between meaningful and trifling authority, I can with a clear conscience suppress as insignificant the voice of conscience. In the realist, reason always triumphs over conscience.

Nevertheless, the kind of reason which triumphs over conscience in the theorizing of a realist has only the name in common with true reason. That, which in the consideration of the realist appears in opposition to the "resistance of his conscience" is not reason, but is rather personal interest. The realist has suppressed "the resistance of his conscience" in order to attain all, but by the reasoning that grows out of private interest he has, in fact, lost everything—both conscience and reason.

In opposition to the realist, the fifteenth-century Czech intellectual defends the unity of reason and conscience, thereby defending as well a specific concept of reason and a specific concept of conscience. Unity is so important to the character of reason and to the nature of conscience that when this unity is lost, reason loses its substance and conscience its reality.

Reason without conscience becomes the utilitarian and technical reason of reckoning, of estimating and calculating; and a civilization based on that is a civilization without reason, one in which man is subordinated to things and

their technical logic. Conscience that has turned away from reason is reduced to a helpless inner longing or the vanity of good intentions.

Reason and conscience, according to the fifteenth-century Czech intellectual, constitute a single unit, and only in that unity can reason be what it really is: reason not in a derivative sense, but rather in the original meaning of the word—to understand and to know, to grasp and comprehend something, to possess an understanding of the meaning of things, of man, and of reality. Only in this unity can conscience be what it is: the backbone, the bulwark, the invulnerability and inalienability of mankind.

He who suppresses "the resistance of conscience" in order to agree with the Council that two times two is ten does not liberate his conscience, but rather transforms it into repressed conscience and any repressed conscience is bad: it manifests itself as malice, mistrust, deep-seated resentment. And outbursts of resentment have occurred in history, as we know, in the form of unrestrained hatred, crude fanaticism, and bestial violence.

The fifteenth-century Czech intellectual defended the unity of reason and conscience and rejected the Council's offer as a false alternative, because if a man agrees with the Council that he has only one eye when he knows he has two, he gains nothing, but rather forfeits everything because to sacrifice reason and conscience means to lose the basis of one's own humanity.

The man who has traded reason for personal calculation and in thus suppressing his own conscience has rendered it evil is a man without reason and conscience. Such a man has lost everything and gained nothing. He has become a worthless person, a person overcome by nothingness. And if we know that nothing means *nihil*, a person lacking reason and conscience is in truth a *nihilist*.

The fifteenth-century Czech intellectual chose between conscience and reason on the one hand and nihilism on the other. And, since the opposition between truth and nothingness is a radical one, his choice, it appears, had to be radical as well.

(1967)

Translated by Julianne Clarke

Chapter 2

OUR CURRENT CRISIS[1]

THE CRISIS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM: PARTY MEMBERS AND NON-PARTY MEMBERS

Politics is neither science nor art, but rather a play for power and a game from a position of power. That game is not amusing, but rather a deadly serious thing, and, for that reason, it entails death, fanaticism, and calculation more often than humor and laughter. Those that are subordinated to its rules and regulations are not only those who wish to play politics and struggle for power, but also those who merely observe or stand on the sidelines and turn their back on politics. Indifference to politics has as yet never guaranteed anyone immunity from its consequences. Apolitical behavior is a constituent part of politics. Politics is an indiscriminate game in which neither the sentimental reproaches of those who believed and felt themselves deceived, nor the puerile excuses of those who held power but "did not know," "were not opportunely advised," or were simply "deceived by time," are valid: the lack of information belongs to a certain kind of politics, just as do the phrases and careerism.

Modern politics proceeds with absolute demands and seeks to subordinate all. It is not science, but it decides regarding science and its results. It is not poetry, but it evokes fear and hidden passions in people. It is not a religion, but it possesses idols and high priests. Politics has become, for modern humanity, fate: each person, in some measure, clarifies by way of political issues the meaning of his or her own existence.

Our current crisis is not merely a political crisis. It is simultaneously a crisis of politics; it questions not just a certain political system, but, at the same time and above all, it questions the sense of politics. Up to now the political system has mystified everything and obscured not only its own

essence but the very essence of politics in general. The first step to getting the crisis under control is the elimination of mystification.

In accordance with a well-known trait, the crisis ensues when those who govern can no longer govern and those who are governed do not want to be governed any longer. In the political crisis, the conflict between the "cannot" of the former and the "do-not-want" of the latter is exacerbated. The nature and the resolution of the crisis depend on the content both sides give to that unwillingness and to that inability. Since every ruling group endeavors to maintain itself in power and never willingly yields power, it explains the crisis *in its own manner* and attempts to control it by replacing old, discredited, and uncreative methods of rule with new, more appropriate ones. For those governed, what is decisive is that at a time of crisis they penetrate the mystifications of the ruling group and that they know how to lend practical voice to their determination to be governed neither by old nor new methods, since they do not want to be governed at all.

The cause of our political crisis lies in the fact that the citizens of this country no longer wish to live like party-affiliated or non-party-affiliated masses with partial rights or none at all, while the wielders of power can no longer exercise their leadership role in the form of a police-bureaucratic dictatorship—that is, with an exclusive monopoly on governing and decision making, a monopoly supported by arbitrariness and repression. The radical resolution of this crisis is possible only if the system of a police-bureaucratic or a bureaucratic dictatorship is replaced by a system of socialist democracy. The difference between these systems is fundamental. The first system is based on the total lack or insufficiency of political rights for the masses of party and nonparty affiliates, while the second bases itself on the complete political enfranchisement and equal right of socialist citizens.

The masses and political manipulation—these are two inseparable concepts. He who speaks of "the masses"—be they composed of party or nonparty members—has in mind a certain system in which the individual does not exist as subject of political activity (that is, of political thought and decision making, of citizens' rights and responsibility), but rather merely as the object of political manipulation. The people are not born as the masses; they become that only later in a system that carries out a practical division of society into two categories: the category of the anonymous majority and the category of the manipulators. The anonymous masses are people lacking their own countenance and responsibility. In a system of masses, nevertheless, anonymity and irresponsibility reign not only in one sphere but in both. The anonymity of the masses responds to the irresponsibility of the manipulators. A system of masses and manipulators is a system of generalized irresponsibility. It is, at the same time, a system of generalized mystification: since political thought is replaced by political phraseology, the system functions merely to instill mass

false consciousness as the presupposition of its own existence, and any attempt at critical assessment is rejected as heresy and sacrilege. Dialectical reasoning, and even common sense, are excluded from decision making.

This system functions without being cognizant of its own nature, and its separate components live in an illusion regarding themselves and others. The masses not affiliated with the party assume that the mass party members constitute a unified collective that knows about and deliberates on everything. Those masses affiliated with the party assume that the political leadership is the all-knowing and all-powerful ruler that makes its decisions on the basis of exact and thorough information. The political leadership views the party masses as eternal novices who are incapable of exercising their own criterion and of determining for themselves what they should know and what they dare to know, what they can and should do. The party leadership is convinced that the non-party-affiliated masses are satisfied with their right to know nothing and to decide about nothing and with their responsibility, from time to time, to make critical comments and "to toe the party line."

This system has characterized itself as a system of transmission belts, but in so doing, it has obviously evaded the meaning of its own words because a system of transmission, of gears and cog wheels, of engineers of the human soul, of iron discipline and iron historical laws, functions and is only able to do so provided that (and to the extent that) everything is reduced to a common denominator of political technique and technology. In a system of transmission and levers the party embodies that transmission and those levers. The party-affiliated masses are the transmission belts, by means of which the subordinate transmission belt of the non-party-affiliated masses is set in motion. The system of transmission is a system of general political deformation that turns Communists into party affiliated masses, and non-Communists into non-party-affiliated masses. Such a system is one of masses and anonymity.[2]

The system does not create people or their attributes. It merely avails itself of those abilities, passions, and interests that are indispensable for its functioning. If in a given political system the "natural selection" occurs in such a way that persons of mediocre intelligence, obsequiousness, weak character—people who are obedient and faithful, loaded with prejudices and governed by resentments—come to occupy the positions of leadership, it is clear that as a consequence one cannot conclude that by nature man possesses only those qualities, The problem consists in that the system described requires for its operation and maintenance just such attributes and such abilities. Any other attribute or ability, from the point of view of their needs, is superfluous or detrimental.

A system based on the relationship between party members and nonparty members forms and deforms in a corresponding manner both the content and meaning of the political leadership. Since both party members and nonparty members are politically manipulated masses with either insufficient rights or none at all, deprived of the political status of subjects, and, accordingly,

deprived of freedom and responsibility, the political leadership, then, comes to be identified with the monopoly on power. To be the leading force in such a system means to have a monopoly and vice versa: he who has a monopoly on power plays, ipso facto, the leading role. Such a status quo possesses its own logic, the consequences of which the power wielders decline to acknowledge: he who wields total power assumes total responsibility as well; he who can decide about everything and everybody bears the responsibility for everybody and for everything.

It is high time that a concrete investigation be undertaken, one which would concern itself seriously with the problem of leadership in politics, with the meaning and functions of genuine and illusory leadership roles in social activity. Every leadership role presumes the existence of those who are at the head and of those who follow them. When is their relationship based on mutual acknowledgment and respect, and when on a one-sided dependency and, consequently, on an imposed subordination? What intellectual, moral, and character attributes must individuals and groups possess in order to be able to play a leading role in society at all?

Within a system of transmission belts, the leading role is identical to the ruling position; it is not possible to exercise it in any way other than by way of commands, supervision, and restriction, as pressure and political monopoly. Through the identification of the leading role with the ruling position is crafted one of the darkest mystifications in the history of socialism. The politicians speak of the leading role of the party, but by this they mean the ruling position of the group in power. This ambiguous dichotomy only reaffirms the fact that, in a system of transmission belts the party splits into two parts: the ruling minority, which usurps for itself the exclusive right to speak in the name of the party and those who toil, and the party-affiliated masses who objectively play the part of the transmission belt.

In the mythologizing identification of the ruling position with the leading role, the unsettling question of what exactly constitutes vanguardism and how it is manifest is never asked.[3] Does the leading role presuppose a maturity of political thinking, a capacity to formulate true ideas, a moral greatness and courage, taste and dignity? Should the leading stratum conduct itself as the bearer of such a level of thought, such a moral code, of such a quality of personal comportment that it can become an example for a free society and for every responsible individual? Or does the social example also manifest itself in a negative form and pose the question for society: what is the privileged group capable of saying and what does it want to say—the group that resolves its inner conflicts regarding power by means of assassinations and intrigues, the group whose representatives are burdened with an absence of wisdom and shame and who sooner distinguish themselves by their mediocrity than by their reason and decency?

THE CRISIS OF POLITICAL PERSONALITIES

As the writer once said, language is at once the most innocent and the most dangerous of all human attributes. The most innocent because all language is and can be only words, mere words, and combinations of words—simple expression and utterance. For that reason the masters of words, writers, can never impose their rule on the world. Language is, however, at the same time the most dangerous of things since it reveals all and it is impossible to hide or to flee from its power of elucidation. This is so because language effects a disclosure above all when at first glance words are not saying anything in particular and seem ordinary and clear. Language always expresses more than what is spoken by those who use it; not only what people know (and say) is expressed in words, but also what they are (and what they do not know and do not say). Aside from that, uttered language always reveals the unspoken, and by so doing, arrives in some way at the expression of what is unsaid, unuttered, subconscious, latent, and involuntary.

For that reason the analysis of the slang and jargon, slogans and lexicon, of every politician directly conveys key meaning. The politician utters a banal sentence: "We lean on the masses for support," and he does not realize that in those few words he has disclosed his concept of man and of the world and that he has, accordingly, said much more than he knew or intended. The politician states: "When evaluating our historical successes we can not overlook certain deformations as well," and he is unaware that his "critical" statement has an apologetic sense because it obscures the essence of what has in fact occurred. This obscuring terminology also reveals the mechanism of mystification, however, and makes possible the revelation of political jargon (voluntary or involuntary, conscious or unconscious) as a cover-up of that which is essential and a diversion of attention away from that which is most important.

If the politician does not know what really happened in the past or what is actually happening in the present, what kind of future can his interventions and proposals promise? What must he know and what kind of politician should he be in order for him to be at the highest level of his age and able to resolve the political issues of the times? It would appear that, above all, the politician must be cognizant of the deeply complex crisis into which this century's politician finds himself hurled.

No matter how far removed they may be with regard to class origin, world view, and political program, Tomáš Masaryk, Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, and Antonio Gramsci all belong to the same category of political philosopher.[4] None of them is a pragmatist or simple politician—one who "makes" politics, defends his/her own political position, analyzes the political situation, or assesses the whole of reality solely with a view to his/her own politics. All of them—by whatever diverse and opposing paths—seek to delve to the basis of

their own activism. They therefore as themselves what politics is after all, what the meaning of power and might is, etc. They do not employ the results of others' scientific research in the formulation of their politics, but rather they themselves are dedicated to science and research in order to be able to create well-thought-out policy. Each of them represents the unity of the practical politician and the political philosopher and embodies not only the unity but also the diversity of both spheres. Therefore, none of them mixes scientific research with political tactics, and each of them comprehends not only the interrelationship between philosophy and the social sciences but their independence and separateness as well.

Is that type of philosopher-politician the exception or the rule? Does he/she belong only to a certain historical epoch or to all epochs? The question, first and foremost, is whether this makes any difference or is significant for politics: does politics take on a different meaning and content depending on whether it is created by politician-philosophers or by politician-pragmatists? Do not all of them—Masaryk as much as Luxemburg or Gramsci—belong to the "nineteenth century" (to which many today refer to with contempt as the century of renewal) while the modern age demands and produces a different type of politician? Must not the politician be a philosopher, or is it sufficient—and, in the context of the unseen development of communications and knowledge, the complexity of relations and the advanced division of labor, even inevitable that a politician be simply practical, that he make use of the findings of research institutions, experts, and advisers for his own needs?

Can we affirm that a certain epoch of historical politician-philosophers ended with Masaryk, Gramsci, and Lenin, and that the epoch of politician-pragmatists has begun? Practical politics and political thought go side by side, and, to the degree that they coincide, their encounter takes on the nature of conflict and struggle, as is obvious from the history of the socialist movement (one classic example for all of these figures is that they lived to see György Lukács).[5] Omnipotent pragmatic politics trades philosophy for ideology; that is, for systematized false consciousness, while powerless critical philosophy vegetates, along with truth, outside the bounds of political reality.

The politician makes decisions; each decision is an act by means of which the selection among several possibilities, factors, and tendencies is established. With each of his acts the politician simultaneously interprets the situation, that is, he bestows a certain meaning upon everything. With a political act everything is seen in a certain light, because by means of it a practical differentiation between the essential and the external is made—between that which cannot be postponed and that which is to be awaited, between the urgent and that which can be neglected. In contrast to the scientist, who researches a problem for as long as it takes to resolve it, and in contrast to the artist who labors over a work as long as it takes for him to consider it finished and perfected, the

politician is in a constant race with time, and the nature of each of his interventions depends on whether or not it was carried out at the right moment, or prematurely, or too late. The timing of political decision making differs from the timing of scientific research and artistic creation. The politician is in danger of becoming a slave to time, and of having his decisions become merely a reflex reaction to the torrent of events—of his work being transformed into political day labor, into politics from day to day. The politician becomes a slave of time if he merely "carries out, fulfills, puts into practice, concludes, and reworks," because the endless string of temporary measures sooner or later obscures the general purpose of what he does.

How, accordingly, can the politician "overcome" time? How can he get past the present and become utopian? How can he get past the routine and become a visionary? How can he propose to look ahead and predict, and, by so doing, become a prophet? The utopian, the visionary, and the prophet, however, are not politicians. The politician can survive the race with time and not be defeated or overwhelmed, only insofar as he is in touch with the essential, and in his own politics proceeds from a solid and justifiable basis. The definition of the meaning and feasibility of politics rests on just such a premise.

On the one hand, the crisis of modern personalities is embodied and defined in the type of political pragmatist that has replaced the politician-philosopher. On the other hand, the crisis of politics has deepened and accelerated. The political pragmatist construes and executes policy as a technical manipulation; that is, as a primitive or somewhat more inspired handling of man—the masses—and he himself is drawn closer by means of his own activism, his thought, his sentiment, and expression into a system of generalized manipulation of people and of nature, the living and the dead, words and ideas, things and feelings. The political pragmatist is incapable of transcending the horizon of a system established through his own activism, of which he himself is a victim. He can, therefore, resolve only those problems which come into his field of vision, or those which he himself has adapted in order for him to be able to understand them. For that reason, the political lexicon composed of the terms: apparat,[6] levers of transmission, deviation, distortion, and the like, is not only a tumult of words existing alongside and outside of reality, but also the exact expression of that which constitutes reality for the politician, the manner in which he perceives and experiences it, and the reality into which he as a public functionary incorporates himself. If the most frightful and most elemental barbarism that ever existed in its history perpetrated upon the Czech people by its own ruling stratum is designated by the term "deformation," then from this inevitably comes not only a certain understanding and evaluation but also the very point of departure. "Deformations" were

led off the stage in the same technical and utilitarian manner as they had been brought out onto it.

The political pragmatist strives to interpret everything on his own level, in the realm of technique, usefulness, and direct effect. He, therefore, thinks about reality in terms of manipulation, utilitarian advantage, and domination; he considers real only that by means of which he can dominate, manipulate, and use. All the rest is reduced in his view to worthlessness, meaninglessness, and nothingness.

At one time, prior to World War Two, there was some sense in posing the question: should a politician be a bureaucrat or a leader of the people? In this choice the bureaucrat was judged to be the representative of a politically privileged and unchecked ruling group, and, by way of example, was elevated to leader of the people, defender of popular interests, revolutionary orator, and politician. Nonetheless, since every polemical truth is in large measure defined by the point of view or the conceptualization against which it is turned, it cannot, because of that very fact—ever be a radical truth, an analysis that goes to the heart of the matter. The problem is better posed thus: under what kind of circumstances does a leader of the people become a bureaucrat and what are the reasons for this change? The issue has to be more accurately expressed in order to reveal the mutual relationship between the revolutionary and power: what will the revolutionaries do with power once they cease being the opposition and become the ruling group? And, most importantly, what will power do to he revolutionary? Are revolutionaries immune to the seduction and the demon of power, or are they, after all, only human? What must revolutionaries do to avoid yielding to this temptation, and what must society do to preserve and defend itself against the possible consequences of "the demon of power"?[7] If political pragmatists term their activity "science and art," and view themselves somehow as scientists and artists, then in so doing they are only prey to illusion, and also create an illusion which has its own hidden problem, the potential danger of all politics: power.

The political pragmatist can resolve only some social problems and only certain kinds of crises, but he is powerless in relation to the reality that exceeds his horizon and possibilities: he can attempt the resolution of an economic and civic-legal crisis, but he remains impotent when faced with a moral crisis. If we know that the moral crisis is not a crisis of so-called morals, but rather one of the very existence of the nation and of the people itself, it is apparent that the political pragmatist is effective in second-rate matters, but in essential matters he breaks down and is not adequate to the demands of the time.

Our current crisis represents above all a conflict regarding the meaning of the people and of human existence: have we sunk to the level of anonymous masses, for whom conscience, human dignity, the meaning of truth and justice, honor, civilized behavior, and courage are unnecessary ballast which

only hinders us in the scramble for apparent or real comfort? Or, are we capable of coming to our senses and of resolving existing economic, political, and other issues in harmony with the demands of human existence and of the existence of the nation?

THE CRISIS OF CLASSES AND OF SOCIETY

For society, just as in the case of an individual life, it is easier to lose one's illusions about others than it is to become free from illusions regarding oneself. And, since our crisis manifests itself as a disenchantment with hope and the awakening of hope, as well as the substitution of hope for despair, individual social strata will become free of illusions only provided that they relinquish the veil of mere mind sets and attain awareness. The first step in this transformation is precisely an examination of attitudes; that is, an inquiry into what is hidden in the attitudes underlying society today. Mistrust, enthusiasm, skepticism, and the like can emerge as isolated moods or as subjective holdovers from the past. Over against these is posed the independent reality of social life, so that in themselves they lack social significance. However, if social reality itself occurs and is manifest within these attitudes, then the dominant attitudes of individual epochs and social strata become revealing social facts of considerable importance. In such an event, the transformation from one attitude to another, from enthusiasm to despair, and from despair to renewed hope, constitutes a shock that makes possible understanding, and the upgrading from mere mind sets to comprehension is accompanied by the establishment of a new attitude in which understanding becomes a definite social fact. Inasmuch as the crisis is a shock that involves all social levels and all realms of human endeavor (thinking, feeling, morality) its outcome depends on the course of two processes. First: will the emotional shock open the eyes of certain social sectors to a deeper and truer understanding, or will it confirm them in their former prejudices, and, blind with new illusions, their ability to evaluate? Second: will true understanding in certain social sectors liberate new energy, critical enthusiasm, and new activism, or will it induce depression and plunge them into passivity and suspended animation?

Our current crisis is one of all sectors and classes of society, while, at the same time, it is a crisis of their mutual interaction. The words reiterated a thousand times over regarding the unity and alliance of the workers, peasants, and intelligentsia have become an empty affirmation, but not only because they have been rendered a mere phrase. On the contrary, they have been turned into an empty phrase because the content of that unity was transformed. The ruling bureaucracy has played a distorting role toward different classes in two regards. It first has attempted to subject modern society to medieval Czech forms, and it has tried to restrict workers to the factories, peasants to the villages, and the intelligentsia to the libraries, limiting their political connections

to a minimum. Secondly, it has deprived each of these groups of its specific outlook, politically transforming all of them into a uniform and expressionless mass. The ideal of the bureaucracy is a closed society based on the class confines of the different groupings and on controlled access to information. The blueprint for society had to become a corporatism that would isolate the different sectors in their separate interests. The bureaucracy was thus transformed into the sole representative of universal interests and the exclusive intermediary for the mutual exchange of information.

Such bureaucratic practice affected the workers most keenly; they ceased to play a political role as a class and found themselves isolated from their most modern ally: the intelligentsia. On the other hand, the intelligentsia was separated from the working class by artificial barriers. The police-bureaucratic regime first depoliticized the workers. The workers as a class ceased to play a political role. This role was usurped by the bureaucracy in a mystical sense; that is, it identified itself ideologically with the whole of society, representing its own monopolistic ruling position as the leading role of a class. And, while the ideology of the leading role of a class (in fact, of course, the bureaucracy) was elevated to the level of a state religion, the true public activism of workers has been reduced to a minimum. Among the inalienable rights of the workers is that of limitless repetition of criticism of shortcomings in their own confine, which naturally have their causes in the overall social framework and which, for that reason, cannot be resolved in the context of one factory alone, the right to demonstrate support as a result of information provided by the ruling bureaucracy, and the expression of acceptance or anger in referenda.

The fate of our current crisis depends on whether or not the working class will see through the dichotomy between ideology and illusions on the one hand, and its own actual political position on the other hand, and will draw all the conclusions from that. To draw all of the conclusions means to become a political force anew, and to become once again the vanguard of a social alliance of peasantry, intellectuals, youth, and others.

The working class cannot play a political role in socialism without freedom of the press, of expression, and of information: without democratic freedoms it remains restricted to the horizon of a single factory and a single workplace, doomed to a corporatism and to the danger that the political bureaucracy will rule in its place and in its name. False friends have tried to convince workers that the freedoms of speech and the press are matters to be dealt with only by a specific sector: that of the intelligentsia. In fact, however, democratic freedoms are of vital importance precisely for the working class, which, without them, cannot fulfill its historic and liberating function. How can the working class possess a political role where it is denied access to information—that is, when it never knows exactly and at the proper moment what is happening in the world? How can the working class play a political role when it is prevented from interpreting information independently on the

basis of its own criterion and where this inalienable activity is carried out by someone else in the name of the working class?

In every language the word intelligentsia is related to reason and understanding. In Czech this word has a twofold meaning, denoting both capacity for thought, talent, and wisdom and a separate social sector. The conflict between the working class and the intelligentsia, consistently provoked by the ruling bureaucracy since 1956, was not only incited artificially, but represented a pseudoconflict as well. The true significance of this conflict lay not in inciting the enmity of one sector versus another—workers vs. the intellectuals—but rather in that it represented an attack on wisdom, critical thought, on the capacity for evaluation—in short, on the intelligence of society's basic class: the workers. This artificial and false conflict was aimed primarily against the working class. Its purpose became quite clear when we recall that, along with the struggle against the intelligentsia—against reason, judgment, and wisdom—primitive attitudes like antisemitism, mob psychology, etc., were revived. And against the possible alliance of wisdom and reason a murky alliance of prejudice and resentment was forged both secretly and openly.

If in the alliance of the three social sectors, mentioned earlier, the political role of workers and of the intelligentsia was ideologically obscured, then this mystification was excessive in the case of the other partner, the peasantry. As a consequence of this the political and social function of the peasantry was reduced to zero. The country as a social and political problem simply disappeared from political consideration, and with it any consideration of the relationship between the people as a whole and the peasantry, as well as the issue of the function of the peasantry in the overall structure of modern society.

The current crisis is not only the collapse of the old, the obsolete, the false, and the inefficient, but it also simultaneously represents the possibility of that which is new. It will either become the point of transition on the road toward a new indifference and routine, or revolutionary social and political forces will view it as a precious historical opportunity to create a new politics, new social relations, a new way of thinking, and new forms of political alignment.

Instead of the outdated model of those who are party affiliated and those who are not, it would be possible in our present crisis to establish a new political alliance of communists, socialists, democrats, and other citizens, one based on political equality and complete rights, originating from the principles of socialism and humanism. Socialist democracy is integral democracy or it is no democracy at all. Among its fundamental principles are included both the self-management of socialist producers and the political democracy of socialist citizens. One languishes without the other.

As soon as the working class is reconstituted as a political force (and that

cannot happen without an attendant democratization of the Communist party and unions and the involvement of the workers' councils), new guidelines will be established for a new class alliance of workers, peasants, and intellectuals. Each sector will bring its own traits and capabilities to this alliance, and the alliance itself will be formed as one of reciprocal influence, and the mutual check and rectification of interests, as a productive striving, and as a fruitful political dialogue. This alliance can become the social basis for an open socialist society, since the dialogue, the discussion, the tension among its separate sectors, constitute an inexhaustible source of inspiration, initiative, and political energy, a source which inspires and enriches the progressive development of society in all its spheres.

THE CRISIS OF THE PEOPLE

The "Czech Question" represents an historical struggle about a point of departure.[8] All depends upon whether or not one begins with an analysis regarding the meaning of human existence, on which basis one reflects on the politics of a small nation in Central Europe, or whether one begins with the question of whether or not belonging to a small and threatened people determines the nature of human existence. But if membership in such a people determines our humanity, then the most essential thing for each individual is to adapt, survive, cope, and cheat history. If the first and foremost issue is that we behave like members of a small people, then the only justifiable response is a simple order, such that the bare existence of that people is saved. Here is where the dispute ensues. Of course a people reaches situations in which it has to defend itself against annihilation, but it is a people only if it has in mind more than bare existence. Mere existence cannot constitute the program and meaning of a people. In those cases when mere existence is everything, a people becomes nothing; that is, it vegetates as a biological unit or as an accidental historical creation. A people defends its existence, but must always be concerned with the meaning of that existence.

The "fairness" of Palacký, the integrity of Havlíček,[9] the "humanity" of Masaryk constitute historical responses to the question regarding the meaning of human existence on the basis of which a place for the Czech people is sought, and a policy of that people as an historical subject of Central Europe—between East and West, among Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy, between Rome and Byzantium, between the Renaissance and the Reformation, between individualism and collectivism, etc.—is formulated. For from such a conceptualization of the "Czech Question" it follows that this must be a universal issue, since, otherwise, it would not be a question at all. Either a

people is capable of not only sustaining the tension and conflict of myriad possibilities and some of the basic currents of European events without being corrupted or hindered by them—but rather, utilizing them autonomously to achieve a fitting synthesis so as to attain the status of historical subject—or it will become the plaything and victim of pressures that will turn it into the mere object of history.

Those executing the reform themselves were not consistent with their point of departure, and the vacillation of Palacký at the justification of humanitarianism was the harbinger of a serious complication of the "Czech Question." If we defend humanitarianism on the grounds of being a small nation but would instead take a different position were we some forty million, that would signify a disparagement of the meaning of humanitarianism and would clear the way for the adversary.

Owing to the fact that we have survived deadly external danger, and that today no one else is threatening the very existence of our people, silencing us, or denying our nationhood, we are under the illusion that nothing further threatens us as a people. In this carefree atmosphere we have consolidated our notion that some national characteristic places us beyond the reach of the contamination of fascism and antisemitism. A particular historical fact was simply inappropriately understood and interpreted. For that reason we must once again ask ourselves: what caused fascism in our national life to remain a peripheral phenomenon which relied merely on a pathological demimonde of society, and caused antisemitism to be able to emerge solely as a secondary feature? In an uncritical analysis this reality is ascribed to the "traditional" democratic values of the Czech people, but it is forgotten that such democratic values cannot materialize out of thin air, but rather result from the goal of conscious, thoughtful efforts of generations. By the same token, democratic values are not bestowed upon this nation once and for all time; one day we may discover with astonishment that the values which we invoke are no longer there.

From the time of Palacký and Havlíček, the "Czech Question" has endured in our society as a public polemic and as a dialogue which the best minds of the times have carried on with the people. This dialogue is primarily a critique of our own mistakes and shortcomings: backwardness, superficiality, obstinacy, and crudeness in public life are the characteristics under attack. The leading minds of the time are in direct opposition to the "politickers" who jovially pat the people on the back, praise their wonderfulness, obedience, and hard work, and, with pompous fanfare confirm them in their selfishness and emptyheadedness. In this public dialogue the question of the meaning of the people's existence is set against the fact of its existence, and, in opposition to the "zoology" of the people, its historical quality emerges: we are a nation only insofar as we distinguish ourselves from a colony of ants or an indifferent mob. We are not inexorably defined by our past, either for good or for evil. If

the people in the past established a great democratic tradition, then that fact, in and of itself, does not mean that democratic values are intrinsic to the nation today and tomorrow. A people struggles constantly for its own character and is embodied as a nation solely in that struggle, if it is to avoid the dangers of internal disintegration. The internal threat is treacherous and deceitful because it emerges imperceptibly and exhibits no conspicuous signs of overt danger. Within this internal change external appearances are preserved, while the core is threatened. The people can be transformed into producers and consumers who speak Czech—an indifferent mass.

The current crisis of the nation consists in the fact that the dispute over the meaning of existence has not been continued publicly, due to the overwhelming impression that it has been settled once and for all. Therefore, not only is the entire effort of reformers denied in fact, but the level which they had attained is abandoned both in theory and in practice. In the case of these philosophers, the concept of nation is not captured in definitions. In their analysis of the Czech question something significant is incorporated, something that they themselves neither consciously elaborated nor knew how to formulate conceptually. Since they started with a critique of the current state of the nation, and addressed themselves to the past in order to elaborate a new future for the nation, for them the nation belongs to a space between yesterday, today, and tomorrow: the existence of the nation is never once and for all provided for and assured. Instead, it forever and unceasingly represents a program and a task. It was clear to them from a practical standpoint that a people is what it makes of itself, but they did not know how to express conceptually their practical understanding regarding the temporal organization of the nation, of history and mankind.

This three-dimensional nature of human time, history, and the nation must be particularly proclaimed today, when the analysis of society and of the people helplessly oscillates from the biased to the extreme. It either bases everything on a future in whose name the past is falsified and the present distorted, thereby turning that very future into something quite problematical: either the present just as it is today, real and tangible, is held up uncritically out of disappointment with an unattained future, or the past is glorified as a unique treasury of values and authenticity as a opposed to an uncertain future and a problematic present.

In the current crisis the nation is exposed to a three-way danger. It can lose its force for changed as an historical subject and become an historical object molded by others. It can disappear as a political nation that renews and affirms itself by thinking through its own platform and by public debate about the meaning of its own existence, and slip into being a populace that speaks Czech and produces steel and wheat. Finally, it can trade the three-dimensional quality of its historical existence for a unidimensional one of merely vegetating and, thereby, forfeit its memory and perspective.

The "Czech Question" is primarily about the human being, who cannot be reduced to mere policy, nationhood, simple patriotism, mere nation-building, plain morality, or culture; it is, first and foremost—for Jan Hus, Comenius,[10] Havlíček, Masaryk—about the truth of human existence and the authenticity of the entire undertaking. For that reason the "Czech Question" is a search for the totality of national life, which must be based on a firm foundation of truth and authenticity. The common bond of politics and individual endeavor, of public events and scholarship, of culture and morality, of education and the everyday atmosphere must become truth and authenticity, in opposition to superficiality, indifference, and the lack of a stand. Only on this basis can the nation forge its own measures that will protect it against wandering between extremes, against the impotent hesitation between megalomania and arrogance on the one hand and debasement and mediocrity on the other. Without these measures we become a people "that has no particular purpose, but who, despite that, seeks to impose its commerce and chancelleries; here something huge that protrudes from the squalor, there something representative that ambushes from the disorder and the incompleteness . . . that combines produce vending and great undertakings—a little of everything" (K. Čapek).[11]

The "Czech Question" is a universal question, but the practical test of its universality is the "Slovak Question." In a certain sense we can even say that the essence of the Czech question is the Slovak question. In the recent statement, "If the Slovaks want a federation, they'll get it," sensitive popular observation unmistakably acknowledged the voice of the Czech "little man" with his arrogance, political primitivism, and absence of tact, with his total incapacity for statesmanlike thought. Contempt or indifference as to the plan for federalization goes beyond a lack of consideration and tact toward a related nation, and is, above all, a manifestation of immaturity and a weakness of political analysis.

In view of the fact that the Czech question in the classical period was formulated as the issue of the independence of a people and that only as an exception was it construed as a problem of national independence as well, the issue of the state, its essence and make-up—including justification for the existence of an independent state—constitutes the fundamental inherited weakness of Czech political thought. Since 1918, the Czech question has existed not only as a discussion regarding the independence of the Czech people, but also, basically, as a problem concerning the existence, nature, strength, and capacity for life of an independent Czech state. Czech political opinion, however, did not know how to react appropriately in the face of this fundamental change, and it failed to achieve a transition from straight national thought to thinking in terms of the state. The relation to the Slovak problem in the most literal sense of the word represents a state test of Czech policy, This is so because it has to show itself capable of analyzing and functioning at a substantially higher level than the horizon of an aristocratic era. In addition, it has to prove itself

capable of transcending political sentimentality based on feelings and attitudes and of attaining, thereby, a level of political rationality. The Czechs and the Slovaks are fraternal peoples, but politically they are above all two equal founding peoples, peoples who founded states, maintain a state, and define the character of that state.

THE CRISIS OF POWER

The difference between thinkers and visionaries is essentially one between that which is autochthonous and that which has been derived. While the former is keen on seeking and finding truth, the latter is concerned with an examination of whether or not this or that conceptualization, discovery, or procedure corresponds to doctrine and authority. The thinker elaborates his understanding with complete inner freedom and is not bound by anything other than the need to discover the status of matters: he is not worried whether or not the truth discovered is something already revealed, or still less whether it is something which has come to be regarded as truth. Truth destroys firmly established ideas or views.

Our current crisis represents, among other things, the bankruptcy of the obvious. That which has been considered obvious for decades has become unclear and murky. That which we thought for decades has been definitely resolved appears to be merely provisional. The confusion in interpretation does not derive from the fact that critical opinion has begun to think, but rather because it has gone public fairly late, for which reason its practical influence is still minimal. Critical opinion does not seek to replace inefficient phrases with more updated ones nor to focus its attention on the result. Its goal is to get to the heart of the issue and to reveal the basis from which our behavior and thinking are derived. It sets out to prove that, on that basis, all is not accurate and in order.

Power corresponds to the basic issue of politics and public life. Its elaboration and expression are known, but a fundamental question is yet unclear: what are the internal limitations of power and what is power capable of? Is power all-powerful and capable of anything or is its capacity limited? Whatever ambiguities it contains are best pointed out by the historical polemic between two well-known Italian thinkers: Gramsci and Machiavelli. The Marxist Gramsci is attracted to Machiavelli primarily because both analyze a problem that is common to many eras and societies. Gramsci too is interested in the nature of power and what it is based on, and to what end it can be used. The pivotal contribution of Machiavelli is his revelation of the link between "human nature" and power. Since the "nature" of man is constant and more inclined toward evil than good, cruelty than kindness, cowardice than valor, indifference than nobility in their actions, Machiavelli defines politics as the

capability for appropriate utilization of such reality in order to seize and hold power. Power is not the goal in and of itself, since it takes on meaning in accordance with the organization and maintenance of the state that must please its citizens. Power cannot overstep the boundaries of politics, that is, of the state, struggle, groups, and parties. It thus lacks a metaphysical quality, and cannot influence the source from which it originated. In other words, it cannot influence "human nature." On the basis of power and through the use of power empires can be founded and destroyed, governments and forms of states can be altered, but "human nature" cannot be changed. In his unambiguous polemic on this concept Antonio Gramsci says, "there is no abstract human essence at once fixed and transcendental and unalterable (a concept which surely has roots in religious and transcendental thought); human essence is the sum of historically determined social relations. . . ."

According to Machiavelli, power can alter conditions and institutions, but "human essence" remains constant throughout these changes. In contrast to this, Gramsci maintains that not only do circumstances and institutions, social and economic conditions change, but so does human essence itself. At first glance it might appear that one point of view is revolutionary, while the other is conservative, one optimistic and the other pessimistic, and that the dispute between Gramsci and Machiavelli represents the battle of faultless knowledge against the one-sided and limited. Such an opinion is born wherever opinion fails to reflect, but rather only mindlessly manipulates by means of current assumptions, slogans, and prejudices. As soon as opinion begins to consider this vision seriously and to penetrate its depths, it becomes immediately apparent that things are far more complicated (reflection does not elicit this complexity, it just reveals it; nonetheless, the common view has it that reason "unnecessarily complicates" everything, and, therefore, it prefers to adhere to unsophisticated illusion).

If there is a "human essence" defined as the sum of historically determined social relations, then it follows that an alteration of this sum similarly alters "human essence." Human essence will be altered if the sum of social relations is changed. But, since the sum of social relations in history has already been substantially altered several times, it should hold that, correspondingly, "human essence" has also undergone change many times over. But, following that, can history exist as continuity? And even more significantly: if it is altered so many times, and "human essence" can be changed, then, can people from one set of relations comprehend people from another set of relations at all, and can they have anything substantially in common that defines them as people? If "human essence" is identified as a set of social relations, how then does one classify the ability to change social and political conditions? Does this ability belong to "human essence," or is it something uncharacteristic? Would it not be more accurate to say that the capacity for transforming conditions is so intrinsic to man that he, by his very "essence" or

"nature," transcends the set of circumstance in which he lives and to which he cannot be reduced?

Since the set of conditions that, according to the theory cited, establishes the "essence" of man also changes, and since it changes on the basis of and through the medium of power—"human essence" depends on power, on its will and obstinacy, on its undertaking and immaturity. Machiavelli's revelation, on the one hand, derives power from "human nature" (evil over good), but, on the other hand, that very "nature" limits the significance and capacity of power: power is not omnipotent, since it is conditioned by "human nature." Therefore, the polemic over the unacceptable assumptions of Machiavelli's conceptualization can lead to unacceptable conclusions: if the alteration of social conditions similarly changes "human essence," power becomes all powerful, since it can alter anything, including the vary "nature" of man. Power is in no way limited and its possibilities are without bounds. The direction in which "human nature" will be modified depends on the nature of power to determine whether it will be modified in the direction of good or of evil.

The metaphysics of such conclusions derive from a metaphysical point of departure. The assumption that identifies as set of social relations with "human essence" is metaphysical, but it fails to subject to critical examination the fact of human "essence" or "nature." Metaphysics always omits something essential, neglects to consider something significant, ignores that which cannot be disregarded. Metaphysics capitulates when faced with the strain of reflecting on the unity of the ephemeral and the lasting, of the relative and the absolute, of the temporal and the eternal. Therefore, also in the realm of metaphysics is the movement from one extreme (one view of metaphysics) to the other (another view of metaphysics); this also holds for the polemic that confuses a grasp of the immutability of "human essence" with the dissolution of that "essence" in a set of social relations. It does not follow from the critique of the shallow vision of Gramsci—which, without going further, holds that Gramsci is right as opposed to Machiavelli—that Machiavelli is now right with regard to Gramsci. And it particularly does not follow from this situation that the truth lies "somewhere in the middle." Critical reflection does not judge, but rather searches for problems amid the conceptualizations of real thinkers and points them out. The confrontation between Gramsci and Machiavelli does not diminish either of them, but rather indicates the necessity for rethinking the relationship between power and man; instead of an uncritical acceptance of the assumption regarding human "essence" or "nature," it poses a new question: "Who is Man?"

Two insurmountable practical issues with respect to revolutionary power depend on the resolution of the relationship between man and power: the transformation of man and the justification of force. Revolution wishes to change man. What does that in fact mean?

The revolution must think seriously about three comments that express doubt regarding its intention to change man and to create a "new man." The first comment is uttered by a skeptic: history is the graveyard of good intentions and exalted ideals. Their realization always turns everything around. What remains of the most beautiful ideas if they are put in place? The second comments is made by a critic: history is the place where truth emerges, and where all that is ambiguous, poorly thought-out, and unsound shows its true face. The realization of ideas and ideals bring about their distortion, but rather reveals their contradictions, weaknesses, and shortcomings. The third comment is expressed by a total skeptic: history is neither irony nor the emergence of truth, but rather mere illusion: people are exactly as they have been and always will be, and history is simply an external and transitory backdrop in which nothing substantially new happens: all that occurs has already happened.

If the revolution does not reflect the substance of these comments, it runs the risk that its notion of a "new man" will either fade like a crazy utopia or will be established like a true historical irony that changes all, but in the direction of its opposite. In this event only the deformation of man would remain of the noble intention to transform man. Revolution must be aware of the fateful change by which the liberation of man is equated with man's capacity for being manipulated, in accordance with which man is as perfectly educated and reeducated as he is completely controlled.

Power is not all-powerful, and its possibilities—however great they may be—are limited: power can establish relations in which man can move freely (and in accordance with which he can evolve and develop his humanity), but it cannot move instead of man. In other words, through the mediation of power it is possible to enshrine freedom, but every man must create his independence by himself and without stand-ins.

Power is latent violence and remains that as long as it retains the power to impose its will and carry out its intentions. Power is the ability to coerce people into doing (or not doing) something. Power exists only as long as it can compel someone or extort something. Behind power there is always force and violence, although power does not always have to manifest itself as violence and cruelty. Cruelty and violence are always supported by power, but power as such is not one and the same with them.

Reflection regarding power falls to two traditional extremes: realism and moralism. Moralism rejects any violence and by such an abstract approach condemns itself either to passivity and mere observation (which, of course, means to a painful standing on the sidelines to merely witness how evil is put into place), or to a moralistic hypocrisy that defends and protects principles, but allows and tolerates exceptions. Realism, on the contrary, cites circumstances and reality, and only imagines it to be concrete when it says that progress in history up until now has always been linked with barbarism and oppression. The concretization of this standpoint, however, is merely illusory,

since it views human reality as a mechanically construed, natural legitimacy in which the past determines the present and the future, and in which the need for what will be is bound to result from that which was. But man is different from a falling stone, and the being of man is different from the being of physical bodies. The past never determines man in a single sense and, therefore, it in no way follows from the fact that progress up until now was carried out with barbarism that it must be that way in the future as well.

Another facet of this characteristic of man is his capacity for distancing, which enables him to exist in the first person and not simply impersonally. The consequence of this is that though what others do is indeed significant, most important of all is what I have to do. If others submit to violence and cruelty, that does not mean that I must be a despot. If violence occurs in history, that fact does not excuse me from the personal responsibility as a politician, citizen, and revolutionary to pose myself the question: when and under what circumstances is violence (never cruelty) justifiable, that is, under what conditions and with what limitations do I dare to use revolutionary violence?

THE CRISIS OF SOCIALISM

The government that erected a monument and immediately afterward ordered that it be torn down has no inkling of the true meaning of its act, and fails to grasp that by its action is demonstrated the metaphysics of modern times: temporality and nihilism.[12] What could more convincingly point out to us the worthlessness and fleet passing of a monument destined to "last forever," yet wrecked after a few months? The government that embalmed the cadaver of a statesman, dressed the mummy in a general's uniform only to later change him to civilian attire and, finally, to reduce him to ashes, did not even suspect the real meaning of its decisions. It obviously overlooked the fact that by its actions it demonstrated the metaphysics of the modern age, which has lost respect for the living and the dead, having turned everything into an object of manipulation, and, in so doing, provided an unlimited space for indifference and poor taste. The government that loses communist officials and permits their ashes, upon the eternal occasion of the Third of December, 1952, to be "spread along the road not far from Prague" (as stated in the report of the investigative commission), fostered a mistaken assumption regarding what it does. It was not even remotely aware that its actions contain the bare metaphysics of human existence: man's struggle between culture and bestiality is never over, and each individual must, ever anew and alone, fight for humanity. All that was carried out in the name of socialism.[13]

From that we must assume that the crisis of socialism is deeper than it appears to the ideologues. Under these circumstances it is entirely justifiable to demand an explanation of just what exactly socialism is, and that the limits between apparent and true socialism be set. Emphasis is placed on the notion

that the essence of socialism is the socialization of the means of production, and all else is construed to be a subjective and coincidental annexation to that which is most fundamental and objectively ascertained. It is emphasized that socialism is a scientifically run society, whose future is linked to the so-called scientific and technical revolution. Who can oppose such definitions, particularly when they are formulated precisely by scientists and intellectuals?

Nonetheless, we must doubt their veracity. Where we are dealing with the so-called scientific and technical revolution, it is surprising that a phrase prevails over analysis, even where critical analysis should be a profession: in the science of society. It is incredible that with such energy and passion intellectuals (after all their experience) gladly again subordinate themselves to ideological slogans, despite the fact that their professional obligation should be precisely to investigate the inner values and significance of ideological slogans. The term "scientific and technical revolution" is a mystification which covers up the true problems of modern science, modern technology, and the modern (socialist) revolution. The ideologues of the scientific and technical revolution link socialism with their vision of the future, in which a predominant number of citizens will be occupied in scientific labor. It, however, does not cross their minds that this quantitative growth cannot lead to a dialectical leap forward and to a new quality, because it is itself a mere manifestation of the change that is occurring in modern science. Modern science is expertise and only as such can it be successful and efficient: modern scientists, however, are specialists who can perform their vocation with efficiency and virtuosity and who, therefore, have no clear idea of the meaning of science or of the assumptions upon which modern science is based.

Modern science is not wisdom, but rather precise knowledge and control. Since the nature of science has altered, science can now conduct itself as "scientific labor," as "research" and "something big," for which it is only necessary to master a certain basic knowledge and some elementary operations that are quite similar, however different their field of endeavor. The modern scientist is an expert, and as a specialist is subject to all the consequences of a highly developed division of labor. The assumption of a society which is founded predominantly on scientist-specialists, research scientists, and examiners is far sooner a stimulus for critical reflection on the meaning of modern science than it is an excuse for ideologically disguising the contradictions.

Science in its most highly developed form, as physics, exists as a unified field of knowledge and investigation, i.e., as a unity of theoretical inquiry and technology. Technology, therefore, essentially belongs to modern science, merging with it and, via that unification, creating a new and vital factor in the whole of modern reality: technical science. Modern technology is neither merely the application of science nor is it a condition of science or its consequences. The combination and unification of modern science with technology

in the totally new existence of technical science is only the historical culmination of two processes that developed from a common base. The common base of modern science and technology is a definite ordering of reality in which the world is transformed, practically and theoretically, into an object. Reality so ordered can become a subject for exact investigation and control. Science and technology represent an approach to reality in which the subject is convinced that reality is demonstrated clearly and, in principle, taken charge of. The basis of modern science and technology is the technical understanding that converts reality (being) into a secure, verified, and manipulated object.

In this context it is possible to assess both the uncritical belief in the omnipotence of technology and of technical progress and the romantic contempt for technology and fear that technology will enslave man. Both of these positions obscure the essence of technology. The essence of technology is not machines or objectified automatons, but rather the technical rationality that organizes reality into a system that can be grasped, perfected, and objectified. However shocking and unusual it may seem to the common view of things, much more has been expressed regarding the essence of technology by Hegel's "evil eternity," Condorcet's[14] "perfectibility," Kant's study on means and ends, and Marx's analysis of capital than by the most rigorous examination of technology and of technical research and discovery. Machines do not threaten man. The enslaving domination of technology over mankind does not signify the revolt of machines against man: in this technological terminology people as yet dimly perceive the danger that threatens them if technological knowledge is equated with general knowledge, if technical rationality takes over human existence to such a degree that all that is nontechnological, nonmanageable, incalculable, and nonmanipulable is set against itself and man as nonreason.

Modern socialism is inconceivable without developed technology and developed technological progress, and without the socialization of the means of production. But both these essential features and all other significant characteristics can be turned against socialism, that is to say, can generate and play a totally opposite role if socialism loses its historical meaning and capacity to render all these elements into a concrete totality. The historical meaning of socialism historic is human liberation, and socialism has historical justification only to the extent that it is a revolutionary and liberating alternative: an alternative to poverty, exploitation, oppression, injustice, lies and mystification, lack of freedom, debasement, and subjugation.

The difficulties of modern socialism in the twentieth century are that for the moment it is incapable, theoretically—much less in a practical sense—of grasping and coordinating its role as a liberating historical alternative: to the societies of hunger and oppression in the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America; to the societies of affluence and comfort in the most developed capitalist countries of Europe and North America; to the societies of the

countries of Central and Eastern Europe whose revolutionary possibilities are far from exhausted.

If socialism does not again and from the beginning make clear its own purpose in the changing circumstances, it could easily cease to play the role of a revolutionary and liberating alternative and, instead, become only an illusory alternative to the conspicuous negativity of the developing nations and to the comfortable positiveness of the most developed capitalist countries: the indications of this danger are evident in the slogan "catch up with and surpass America," as well as in the actual existence of a society that merely replaced a system of universal commerce (of the reign of money and capital) by a system of universal manipulativeness (a reign of unlimited bureaucratic power).

Each and every practical step that liberates us from that uncommon conglomerate of bureaucratism and Byzantinism from that monstrous symbiosis of the state and pagan church, of hypocrisy and fanaticism, of ideology and faith, of bureaucratic tedium and mass hysteria, has, of course, greater significance than the most boastful proclamations of freedom. But these minimal little steps by which we reject political crime can neither hide nor postpone the urgency of the essential questions that we have as yet not touched upon, but without which socialism as a revolutionary alternative for the people of the twentieth century is inconceivable without posing anew the questions of who is man and what is truth, what is being and what is time, what is the nature of science and technology, and what is the meaning of revolution.[15]

THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY

If those societies that claim to be socialist have merely replaced universal venality ("I'll buy everything," said Gold) with universal manipulability ("I'll decapitate everything," said the sword), and are thus drowning in confusion because they did not carry out the epochal change they promised, but simply replaced one system with another, this leaves humanity without any real alternatives, caught in an inescapable vise—either everything is universally exchangeable or universally manipulable. The struggle between these two systems, or possible victory of one system over the other, still has to do with the triumph of a system, and not the liberating breakthrough from the system to the world. The world cannot be reduced to a system, just as reality cannot be transferred to what appears to be real.

Hidden in the quarrel and rivalry between the two systems are forces which are active in both of them and which control them both, but which escape notice. Whether in the market system or system of regulation, behind both and through both, there are powers which assert themselves. They use free competition and central planning both as their own instrument, and in both realize their potential and their interests. Since in both systems there are

forces at play which are partly hidden and partly come to the surface for the participants, but which the participants are aware of only in their visible forms, this performance manifests itself as a dual performance. This is true whether it is in the form of free competition or of state direction. It is a performance on two levels, of which only the external and surface level arouses any interest, while the other, hidden layer registers in such terms as boredom, "la malaise," haste, chance error—and thus in indications which apparently have nothing to do with one's own performance. In both systems the real nature of the system remains hidden behind the forces at work. In the one system it appears that the highest political organ in the country—the Party—controls these forces from above, and gives them orders which are then faithfully carried out. In the other system, however, freedom is left to these forces, so that a rational harmony will come out of the chaotic encounter of the forces. There is something in both cases, however, that comes out of each system as an unwanted, unexpected, unplanned-for, and unthought-of product of the system, something that undermines and damages the very essence of man and the historical character of history.

Because these unseen powers assert only themselves, and will not allow anything else alongside, or especially not above themselves, their existence manifests itself by absorbing that which is different, doing away with everything else. It is a process of *Gleichschaltung*, of making everything uniform, of leveling, and of doing away with the unique character of things [as was the social policy in Nazi Germany—ed.]. This development of unseen and nameless dark forces has only itself as its goal. It produces itself in ever greater proportions, and transforms everything it comes into contact with into something like itself, related to itself. It makes everything conform to its own course.

The struggle of the two systems tends to blind us to the fact that there are hidden forces working in the background: a crisis exists because there is a tendency for this dispute and conflict to conceal the existence of these forces. There is a crisis because the victory of one system over the other would not mean that the crisis of modernity had been resolved. The conflict of the two systems is merely the manifestation of the crisis, and serves only to obscure it.

There are forces at work behind the providential hidden hand that conjures up harmony and prosperity out of the anarchy of individual egotistical actions, just as they are at work behind the all too visible iron hand of the managing center. In reality, these forces guide and determine the motion of both of these hands, and predetermine the outcome and the consequences in a way that neither of the actors anticipates. With the help of various hands and levers and hooks, open and hidden, natural and artificial, ordinary and extended to great lengths, humanity extends to what was previously unattainable. It thus seems to be within the power of humans to transform not only the earth, but gradually even the entire universe, into a perfectly operating laboratory, into a

gigantic, inexhaustible storehouse of energy and raw materials, designed to serve for the comfort of mortals. This ability, which transcends all boundaries and all limits, also extends to the sacred and the essential, and does away with all differences: everything is within reach, everything is at hand, and everything is transformed into something which is easily accessible and ready to use. Toward this goal all frontiers disappear; unlimited perfectibility and gigantic and immeasurable growth become the order of the day. Any standard is lost in this immeasurability, and in a reality without any standard the highest standard becomes sheer measurability, comparability, and adjustability.

This process of bursting all boundaries and wiping out all differences means that all areas of reality have become accessories to activity which interferes with everything, touches everything, and which encompasses everything. Nothing can break through this activity, just as there is nowhere that a person could flee to in order to escape it: he only moves from one area of activity to another, and he is constantly in motion. Medicine, psychology, psychiatry, recreation, and tourism are all auxiliary means of activity; they are themselves activity, and maintain people in motion, or, return them to activity after some temporary derailment or sudden indisposition.

A person never knows solitude in activity, and is never alone. He is always accompanied by a shadow, whose outward appearance is continual haste, and whose essence consists of the impossibility of getting out of activity. No matter where a person goes, activity is always at his heels. Activity takes a person through and accompanies him on all of his journeys, even his last journey, because everything is an accessory to activity and remains in activity.

The often-repeated view that industrial society has become the subject of the modern age means only that the mechanism of production and consumption—that modern perpetual-motion machine, that process of achieving and mobilizing everything that is continually perfecting itself—has seized the initiative and determines, even dictates, the rhythm and tempo of human life. The process of perfectibility thus becomes at the same time a process of transposition and transposability. Man, who constructed this mechanism of production and perfectibility and set it into motion, becomes more and more caught up in its operation as time goes on, and turns into a mere accessory of this modern pseudosubject, this enterprising and omnipotent transposability.

This new power is stronger than the traditional power of gold or of force, stronger than the combined power of both of them together. Everything is procurable and available to the growing power of the process of production, a power that is constantly perfecting itself, one which nothing can withstand—one in whose current everything is caught up, voluntarily or involuntarily.

The difference between the possible and the impossible is abolished in this process of perfectibility, because everything is possible in its omnipotence—that is, everything is practicable and "do-able." It is only a question of time

with everything—i.e., a matter of perfectibility. Since the distinction between the possible and the impossible has disappeared, and everything is now possible in principle, one day—once the necessary technical conditions are created—the distinction between what is permissible and the impermissible will also be abolished. In principle, everything that is practicable will be permitted. Already today everything is being transformed into a reality that can be controlled, and everything submits to reality, i.e., submits itself to be manipulated and transformed. If basically the entire universe can be converted into an experiment of energy and raw materials, why should humans be excluded from this laboratory experimental process. Why should they not also be reduced to the energy and raw materials needed to keep the system going, for laboratory and cosmic experiments?

In opposition to the soothing and lulling visions of those who proclaim the "scientific and technological revolution," it would be good to recall the wise saying of the classical philosopher who said: "they have calculated everything to ingenious proportions, but they forgot one thing—to destroy unpredictable passion." In contrast to Goethe's time, or to preceding eras, this is not an obsession of one individual who is abnormally immoral, but rather involves normally functioning societies. The essence of this system which produces ever-growing and never-ending abundance is destructiveness. Built into the inner workings of this block is a frenzy of destruction, which goes hand in hand with the self-evident nature of increasing levels of comfort.

It is true that this unstoppable process of the improvement, growth, and advancement of prosperity is interrupted from time to time by catastrophes. From the perspective of the process, however, wars, brutality, murder, and concentration camps are only temporary calamities, negligible disorders in the operation of the system, defects which can be removed. They are caused by either the breakdown of the human factor, or by wearing out and imperfection in the technical factor. The fact that these things exist cannot slow down or stop the progress of the mechanism of transformation; rather, what happens is that after short interruptions they speed up the process of transformation, and contribute to making it work better.

This sketchy, fragmentary, and imperfect outline of the existence of unnamed dark forces indicates that we have to do here with a phenomenon that determines the way in which the twentieth century is shaped. There has not yet been, however, much of a phenomenology of this formation—an analysis of the phenomenon in which it would be possible to see what is really going on in the modern age, what the twentieth century really is. This does not mean, however, that the existence of this phenomenon has entirely escaped attention, or that attempts have not been made to name and to describe it. One need only cite briefly a list of some of these attempts: W. Rathenau, "Ein allgemeiner Mobilmachungsplan"; Ernst Jünger, *Die Totale Mobilmachung*; E. Husserl, "The Crisis of European Sciences"; M. Heidegger, *Das Gestell.*

There is an admirable historical formation at work in the twentieth century for which there has been as yet no adequate nor universally recognized designation. Economics, technology and science—which used to exist independently and alongside one another—have blended into one formation. This represents the coalescence of economics, science, and technology into one symbiotic whole, agglomeration, block, or process. Perhaps, though, this formation comprises them all together and at the same time?

The block (let us use this term, because it has the advantage of pointing to activity—to blocking, blockade, inclusiveness, and encirclement) exists in both systems, although in a different way in each. This block is cynical, derisive, malicious, and it behaves with lordly superiority toward every form of ownership: its power is so great that it settles in and lives in every type of ownership, be that private capitalist or state bureaucratic ownership. The block also comes into being where society is always merely catching up, and continually promising that one day it will surpass all of the others. It comes into being with all of its ambiguous priorities, at least in one area, and, thus, in a perverted and a caricatured way—in that incommensurable predominance of arms and the preparation to fight that is the result of the managed and preferred coordination of science, technology, and economics.

Because man has lost all standards, and is not even aware of the loss, and because he immediately and unconsciously introduced substitutes for these lost standards—i.e., introduced measures by means of which he judges and defines reality in terms of quantifiability and controllability—he has gradually become enslaved by a false standard, one dictated to him by his own constructions and products. It seems to man that he is in control of everything, but in reality he is controlled by some foreign motion, rhythm, and time; he is dragged along by processes about whose nature and substance he has no idea. Both the free play of market forces and the management of reality by a state bureaucratic center—free and released forces on the one hand and bound and binding forces on the other—are themselves the mere instruments of hidden forces which assert themselves behind the backs of both the market and central planning. These overlooked, merciless forces make use of both the market economy and state management as their own forms; they move about in them and multiply.

In the actions of both of these forces—free and regulated—the boundless subjectivism of the modern age asserts itself in different ways. This subjectivism means that events are turned on their heads, and it is one in which the true subject—man—becomes an object. The perfectible mechanism of foreign forces is thus installed as the subject, though, of course, as a false and inverted pseudosubject. The widespread subjectivism which has been let loose in the modern age is an inversion which is daily and massively coming into being, when the irrationality of this aggressive pseudosubject imposes its own logic, motion and rhythm on the former subject—man.

Because this increasing subjectivism applies to both systems, humanity is

in a crisis. The two systems are rivals that hurl recriminations at one another, where one consists of the rule of money and capital and the other the dictatorship of a bureaucratic minority by police methods. The encounter between them that obscures vision is the product of a well-concealed force, this all-powerful subjectivism. Reality itself is cut in two by this crisis, because neither of these two systems provides a true alternative to the roots of modern subjectivism—nihilism.

In addition, to be sure, the crisis that broke out in our country—which seemed to be a single crisis, limited in scope—is in fact part of a deeper and wider crisis, and the entire reality of the modern age is caught up in it. Our crisis is merely the manifestation of the deeper and hidden general crisis. The crisis here is not only a crisis of the unexamined roots of socialism and of capitalism (the limitless growth of productive forces as the goal of both systems), but is above all a crisis of the overlooked inversion of the modern era. This unchained subjectivism is a historical process in which humanity—having at some point extricated itself from the pilgrimage of medieval authorities, institutions, and dogmas—and, imbued with the will to constitute itself as a unique subject, one capable of anything, is reduced (in an ironic historical game) to a mere accessory. It thus becomes an object of the modern consumer society, a society that is constantly perfecting itself and which has become superior to humans and isolated from them as their mystified and yet real subject.

This conflict of the systems—one system efficient and successful, captivated by the vision of comfort, and the other falling behind and barely functioning but bragging of its historical mission—evokes illusions in each of the opposing sides, illusions of a dual nature. There are the illusions of those who have fallen victim to prosperity and whom society has thrown out unemployed, and then the illusions of those who want to save the environment and fantasize collectively that the other system can solve their problems: unemployment and the devastation of the environment. On the other hand, there are the illusions of those who have eyes only for the consumer affluence on the other side, and are not aware at what price and with what effort this luxury is bought. These mutual illusions bring out a blindness which does not want to see that neither of these two systems—neither the condemned nor the preferred—has the courage or the power to resist the collective danger to all, which is nihilism.

The crisis of modernity consists of the accelerating transformation that is converting reality into a calculable and controllable reality. It transforms speech into mere "information," imagination into images, sterile illustrations, and sloganeering. In this transformation towns are changed into agglomerations for production, consumption, and transportation; the countryside into territories and regions; the mind into mental processes subject to influence and also outwardly curable. The mind, broken down and reduced to mental

processes and deprived of both its uniqueness and its freedom, regards this transformation of towns into "developments" and the disappearance of the countryside as something which is necessary and self-evident in these times. It moves around in this inverted environment like a fish in water because it itself has become a mere accessory of inversion.

The modern block or formation that is the driving force of the transformation itself comes into being through a process of transformation. In order for science, technology, and the economy to grow into a new whole each of these elements must be fundamentally transformed. Science has lost wisdom, but has gained in effectiveness and outward power. The economy has surrendered the essential connections with its home, with its own native land, but it has turned into perfectible efficient machinery producing golden apples. Technology has turned or reversed inventiveness and imagination into one specific direction, into the search for and preparation of means of comfort and a luxurious life without effort.

The current crisis is the crisis of modernity. Modernity is in crisis because it has ceased to be "*con-temporary*," and has sunk to mere temporality and transience. Modernity is not something substantial that concentrates the past and the future around and in itself, in its setting, but is rather a mere transient point through which temporality and provisionality rush. They are in such a hurry that they do not have time to stop and concentrate on the full present, or on that present which is in the process of fulfillment. In this permanent lack of time they are forever and always fabricating a disintegrating provisionality, a mere temporality. This is a situation where a family does not have time to sit down around a table together and live like a close community of people, or when a politician is pursued from campaign to campaign and does not have time to reflect on the meaning of his activity. In this situation—one which empties out the present and into the depths of its interior inserts: nothing, nihil—town squares break down to traffic intersections and parking lots, the village green is destroyed because that majestic feature of the age—the department store—overshadows lime trees that have stood for centuries. Baroque church or chapels, architecture declines to the technologically progressive building, and community to a consumer group.

This block or formation throws modernity into permanent crisis: modernity has lost one dimension of time, and thus has lost substantiality and substance. It has given up perfection for limitless perfectibility.

The crisis of modernity is thus a crisis of time: in the process of unbroken transformation and transformability only perfectibility is real. For this reason perfection, which on principle opposes and defends itself against any form of perfectibility, withdraws to a marginal place. In this way also the real nature of the modern block or formation becomes mystified—that conglomerate of powers and possibilities that are under a spell, whose awakening could have represented the beginning of an epochal, liberating turning point.

THE CRISIS OF PRINCIPLES

It is said that modernity has been reduced to materialism. Perhaps it succumbed to the temptations of the ideologists who disseminate the meaningless phrase about the primacy of matter over consciousness, or, does this materialism have a real basis—not just consisting of words and propositions, but inscribed on the interior structure of modernity? Modernity is materialist because everyone—the supporters of idealism and its opponents, capitalists and socialists—is caught up in the grandiose process in which nature is changed into material and matter, into a seemingly inexhaustible storehouse of raw materials and energy at the service of man. But the approach that depreciates reality (birth and rebirth) into a mere object for transformation—an object whose products guarantee growing affluence on the one hand and generate waste, ashiness, and leadenness on the other—also demeans man. In this process of transformation his spirit disintegrates into the soullessness of a fabricated reality, and into a display of brilliance that obscures the emptiness of the age. The productive transformation of the modern era has therefore two sides and is personified in two figures, which it is possible to designate in words: produce and show off (display). In this modern alchemy—which goes in the opposite direction from traditional alchemy and does not try anymore to get gold from lead, but rather transforms "gold" (i.e., the Earth's treasures) into waste and lead—"spirit" (i.e., man) is also transformed, and his transformation is more of a fall than an ascent.

The disintegration of the spirit into a soulless reality, in which people have to live as if they were in the world of nature, and into brilliant show, whose function is to make the ugliness of this reality more pleasant, is merely an announcement of the disappearance or complete decline of the spirit. The spirit is then reduced to a productive, organizationally able, and efficient intelligence, and this substitution is then concealed by the call to return to "spiritual values." The moment when an age elevates "spiritual values" (as against nonspiritual values) to the first or most advanced place the fate of the spirit is already decided: its place is taken by "intelligence."

Insofar as the spirit is faithful to itself and comes to itself, wakes up and recovers, and recognizes its essence in nature (physis) with which it is intrinsically bound and related—related in life and death—it must therefore treat nature with respect and understanding as a fellow player, not act as a conqueror toward it. The disintegration of the spirit is thus always accompanied by the reduction of nature to mere matter and materiality, material left completely at the mercy of the capriciousness and greed of the arrogant subject. But the spirit that elevates itself above nature and reduces nature to mere materiality does not know what it is saying and doing, and particularly loses sight of the fact that it depreciates its own self through this act. Degraded mat-

ter is the product of a spirit which is degrading itself, which has already undergone decay. This superior and exploitative relationship to nature means that the spirit is so preoccupied with itself and its sovereign blindness that it is no longer capable of judgment or insight, it is so drunk with its own foolish power that it is ripe for a fall into the abyss.

In the modern transformation everything is proportional and measured by advantage, utility, and practicality. In this way everything is taken and connected to the course of evaluation, and is reduced to interchangeability. In this situation there is no appeal for spiritual values to descend to material values by a critique of conditions, but rather through an apology for inversion. The transformation of the spirit and nature into values, greater or lesser, is already a manifestation and a product of perversion and confusion. Neither spirit nor nature are or can be—in origin, in essence, in terms of the meaning of their existence—concerns of proportionality or interchangeability, and thus can never be values.

To convert everything into values and to confer this or that value on everything does not mean that it is promoted, sublimated, or raised to a higher level, but rather that it is lowered and reduced to one dimension, where its valorized and appraised essence loses its unique character.

Value, in the sense that the modern age uses this term, means the conversion of everything into the sphere of interchangeability; but spirit and nature are not interchangeable, and thus cannot be mistaken for one another. It is only because neither spirit nor nature are values, and because they exist outside of any interchangeability, that they can remain in their appointed place: spirit in spirituality and nature in naturalness. As soon as spirit is made into the highest value and nature desecrated as a ruthlessly exploited storehouse of raw materials and energy, the way is wide open for bad taste, insolence, and provocativeness, and thus for the triumph of the system over the world.

To transform spirit into the highest value, and nature into a calculated and lucrative value, means to accept as natural and ordinary the epochal shift and change that has taken substantiality from every essence and as a substitute has given it a disposable, manipulable, and revocable value, one which lacks something essential: dignity.

For this reason, the age of values is also the age of the lack of dignity, farce, and illusion. Illusion has been elevated to a universally accepted and recognized style of life, and the person who knows how to perform is the main actor of the age.

The splitting of the spirit into the soullessness of conditions and the brilliant commentary on these conditions is already one consequence of the disintegration, where the spirit stops being itself and is transformed into something quite different—something outwardly similar, but essentially foreign and hostile to it. Spirit has changed into intelligibility.

Conditions are neither in a "natural state" nor innocently self-evident

when a certain amount of wheat is equal to a certain amount of iron, when this quantity in turn is quite naturally connected by a price relation to a painting by Goya, and when truth, freedom, democracy, love, and consciousness soar above the "material" products as the highest values. This is also true when all of these things together form a single intertwined system of value and price relations where only something that has a value is maintained in circulation. A fatal transformation takes place at the moment when truth, honor and consciousness are elevated into the highest (spiritual) values, when everything is made worthless as an object of proportionality, valuation, exchange, and replacement. Before values can be revalued an ironic change must take place. This change deprives the essence of things of their uniqueness, and seems to elevate everything to the heavens of valuation, whereas in reality it has reduced everything to the ground of exchangeability, and to the ambiguity of confusion—which becomes the historical mode of untruth.

No mother behaves toward her child as she does toward a value, nor does the believer who prays to God kneel before the highest value. A child, God, a river, consciousness, a cathedral—none of these are in essence values, and to the extent that they become values, are transformed into values, they lose their own unique character in the process. In this empty form they can then become objects of valuation, and can arbitrarily and easily be connected into the functioning system.

At the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, philosophy regarded the godlessness of the era as due to the fact that God had been driven from mind and reality to a consecrated, abstract, and pure belief, so that this profaned reality, abandoned by God, could become the object of barter and of deals. How would philosophy regard our own era, which in its presumption has also involved God in its plans and designs, in the entire perfect machinery of universal exploitation? It also seems that everything that man has undertaken on Earth and in the universe has been accompanied by blessings "from above."

The spirit must be alert so as to not lose its presence of mind and sink to become a mere organizing intelligence, so it does not become so impoverished that it becomes a mere wraith without substance. The spirit remains alert and faithful to itself by becoming concrete and demonstrating its presence of mind in thinking, in poetry, and in deeds. It must demonstrate this in the variety of forms it takes, and it must resist being reduced to a one-sided and abstract reasoning, inwardness, or effectiveness. (*Dialectics of the Concrete*, written in 1963, was an attempt—a mere attempt, and thus an attempt without any corresponding results—to think through in different circumstances the problem in the term "praxis" that Hegel concentrated in the concept of "Spirit": the unity of thought, invention, and action, or, *denken*, *dichten*, and *thun*).

Modern man is in a hurry and is restless. He wanders from one place to another because he has lost what is essential. Because he has no connection to

the essential, he always hurries without pause after the unessential, and the accumulation of the unimportant. With this frantic pursuit after the unessential he is attempting to close and leap over the emptiness left from the rejected and forgotten essential. The essential in human life disappeared or was lost, and that loss was replaced by the pursuit after what is unessential. The philosophical formula which locates and describes this impoverishment and haste, the sinking to the unessential, is the phrase "God is dead." This phrase is not a dogmatic statement, and it has nothing to do with disputing or giving proofs for the existence of God. Its validity can neither be shaken nor confirmed by pointing to rising or falling levels of religiosity. The phrase is a philosophical thought. It does not say that the highest values have become devalued or ceased to be valid, nor does it say that their place has not yet been taken by any new values. It has a deeper and more shocking meaning: the loss of the essential. Because man abandoned the essential in a historic wager as unnecessary, and committed himself to the frantic pursuit after the unessential, he vegetates without any connection to the essential. Nothing essential speaks to him any more, and he has even ceased to understand the very word "essential."

The phrase "God is dead" and the view which emphasizes that God is the highest value are both saying the same thing in different words. They are proclaiming the advent of an era in which the unessential is winning out over the essential.

The essential has disappeared, and this loss manifests itself as an open wound and a fatal injury. This worries man; he does not, however, have the courage to admit this loss, and flees from it as from a pursuer—and seeks deliverance and shelter in the incidental and unessential. Because he has become reconciled to this loss, and thus lives with the assumption that he can balance this out by acquiring and collecting the unessential, in this reconciliation he finds himself in a false and inverted world. This peace is based on decrepit foundations which have lost their measure: such a reconciling and reconciled peace masks the loss of measure. Man runs from the loss of the essential and pursues what is attainable and unessential; he is thus always running forward, but in reality he is retreating. This inconsistency between the two opposite movements—to retreat forward and to go progressively backward—is the source of the tragicomic nature of the modern age.

Because man has chosen the unsubstantial, he sees the meaning of life in the accumulation of products, ownership, and in the limitless, unstoppable, continually perfected production of things, goods, pleasure, and information. He regards safeguarding and ensuring growth and the spread of the transient and unessential as the essence of life. Because of this he hesitates and moves about in confusion, and this confusion is the reigning mode of untruth. Production has become the dominant method of determining man's relation to the existing world: production has absorbed creation and initiative. This over-

grown activity of the subject is impoverished to such an extent that it only produces—continually, infinitely, and ever more perfectly produces—but no longer creates anything.

No towns are founded, only new housing developments are built. Orchards and vineyards are not planted, but the production of high-yielding fruits is increased. Families are not formed, only partnerships—called marriages—are formed and dissolved. Communities are not formed, but in their place a fickle and superficial public is established. Even "changing the world" is done as something ready made, as the organization and reorganization of conditions that are meant to mass produce happy and free people on the assembly line. The indifferent greyness, serial production and operations stand opposed to the celebration of creation. The primary figure of the age is not the farmer, the craftsman, or the poet, but is rather the organizer and arranger (or producer), all in one person.

To go around in confusion and not be able or willing to see this confusion for what it is means to fall into untruth and to reconcile oneself to it. Man goes around in this confusion as if it were his natural and normal environment, and the inversion and perversity of his whole relationship to the existing world does not occur to him at all.

This relationship to the existing world altogether has changed in the modern world from the ground up, and has become a relationship without any foundations. The modern age is an age of crisis because its foundations are in crisis. The crisis of the foundations stems from the fact that things are becoming more confused at the very foundations, and confusion and untruth are built into the very foundations of the modern age. By hesitating in this confusion man changes into a person who arrogantly claims to have the right to live in affluence whatever the cost, that right is on his side—if he claims what seems self-evident; that is, to participate in the product and profit which mankind daily and yearly gets out of nature. Still, the person who claims to have right on his side, and that he has a right to anything, does not do justice to the existing world. He is then moving outside his right, he is not in the right nor the truth.

We are not the keepers of truth, and nothing—not youth or age, origins or social standing, dogma or belief—nothing gives us the right to become self-satisfied, to assume that truth has already been given to us. We become far removed from the truth if we live in the illusion that truth is in our hands, that we can tamper with it or do with it whatever we like. It is much more likely that truth has us (as the much-repeated phrase that Schelling introduced to philosophy puts it). Only when we are moving in the space opened up and illuminated by truth do we come near truth and in relationship to it.

The phrase that resounded at a recent gathering of the Prague youth, "*Stand in the known truth!*," must be correctly understood and interpreted. To stand in the known truth means not to be caught up in ownership of would-be

truth. It means to get into motion and take upon oneself the effort and pain of experience, which goes through all of the formations of modernity in order to reveal its true nature, to liberate itself and these formations from the rigidity of reification and personification. To stand in the known truth thus constitutes a revolt against ossified conditions, resurrection to a dignified life. It means always being willing to revolt and stand anew, to come into being and be born, to make another attempt to break out of the closed system to the openness of the world.

The person who rises up to stand in the known truth like this must inevitably come to the conclusion that today's crisis does not only concern this or that area or side, but rather encompasses the very foundations. Mere corrections and adjustments will not do—the truth requires a fundamental change in approach to the existing world, and only such a fundamental transformation will lead man from this crisis.

Ecologists assume that all that is needed is to preserve the environment. Philosophers conclude that what is necessary is to save the world.

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Translated by Julianne Clarke and James Satterwhite
(Parts 1–6) (Parts 7–8)

Chapter 3

SOCIALISM AND THE CRISIS OF MODERN MAN

The significance and range of contemporary events in Czechoslovakia can be best characterized by the terms "crisis" and "humanistic socialism." In these two expressions is contained much more than might appear at first glance They are at once the affirmation of something in existence and the program of that which must come; however, they also constitute a certain connection between thought and action, critical reflection and revolutionary policy. Czechoslovak society is in crisis and is attempting to resolve it by gravitating toward humanistic socialism.

That crisis is, indeed, the direct political, economic, and moral crisis of one nation and one society, but its nature is such that problems are revealed within it which transcend the framework of a single nation or society. This is directly the crisis of a definite ruling sector, a definite political party, a definite form of social relations, a definite economic model. Nevertheless, the character of the crisis is such that within it are revealed some of the basic problems of politics in general, of society in general, of the human community in general. The question therefore, arises: What in the Czech crisis has come to the surface? What discloses the meaning of this crisis? It seems that the crisis is a rare historical moment in which much becomes obvious that, in normal times, remains hidden under the surface, in which is displayed something basic and essential otherwise remains hidden. The crisis of one nation and one society in a certain sense manifests and lays bare the crisis of modern man and the crisis of the bases on which modern European society rests.

It cannot go unnoticed by a more careful examination that the national crisis in Czechoslovakia is the crux of the crisis in Europe, and that within the Czech crisis the European crisis emerges, extraordinarily summarized. At the same time this points up the magnitude of the task which today's Czech society has taken upon itself, the significance of which is indicated by the term "humanistic socialism." A consistent resolution of this crisis represents, in

fact, a clarification of the question regarding the meaning of socialism and of revolution, of the mission of policy and power in the modern world. With its own theoretical depth and practical pressing need, the question will again be raised: Who is man, what is reality, what are nature and truth, what is time, and what is being?

If events in Czechoslovakia are a rare historic moment in which that which was hidden comes to the surface, that which is latently present in the European reality of the twentieth century, perhaps this should lead to a second aspect of this moment as well. The contemporary period in Czechoslovakia has shown itself to be a historic moment in which critical thought, individual groups, and individual forces stand before open possibilities, and have the opportunity to influence the course of events and shape it. Those events will most likely be decisive for future decades with regard to the nature of the relations and institutions in which the citizens of this country will live and work. Definite perspectives for theory and critical thought are unfolding, since they have the opportunity, to a certain extent, to influence the course of practical events and—however temporarily—to realize that which in normal times constitutes a mere postulation or wish: the unity of theory and practice, the unity of thought and action.

There has been and continues to be a fateful misunderstanding if the people of Western Europe fail to grasp that what happens in Eastern Europe is and remains an integral of European history, and of the European problem in general, or if the people of Eastern Europe fail to see that their events and history take place on a definite common European base.

The bureaucratic-police system that reached a crisis in Czechoslovakia and is now changing to a system of socialist democracy has much more in common with the aforementioned crises of modern man and of the base of European society than first meets the eye. Certain historic features of that system that are important and play a significant role in actual conditions of the countries concerned should not conceal their common origin and the base by which they are indirectly linked internally to the basic realities of the Western capitalist world. Stalinism, as a bureaucratic-political system of rule and control, is based on the assumption of the universal manipulability of people and things, man and nature, ideas and feelings, the living and the and the dead. The hidden foundation and starting point of this system is determined by a general obfuscation of the concepts of man and the world, of things and reality, of history and nature, truth and time.

If that system has reached a crisis, not only have the methods and forms of government and control become problematical, but, together with that, so too has the entire complex of practice and of assumptions about man and history, about truth and nature. In other words, Czechoslovak events are not the customary political or normal economic crisis but rather a crisis of the

foundations from which contemporary assumptions regarding reality and the universal system of manipulation have grown.

Humanist socialism, which there is a constant struggle to establish today in Czechoslovakia, is a revolutionary, humanistic, and liberating alternative to a system of universal manipulation. It is, therefore, understandable that in these events one is dealing with socialism and by no means with a return to capitalism. Accordingly, humanistic socialism is the negation of both capitalism and Stalinism.

Were the Czechoslovak experiment to succeed—and its success depends upon its being consistently implemented and upon its neither being arrested halfway nor compromised by halfway measures that would thwart its development—it would offer both extended and practical proof that it is possible to overcome a system of generalized manipulation in both of its currently reigning historical forms: both as bureaucratic Stalinism and as democratic capitalism. The undemocratic, bureaucratic, primitive police method which is practiced and carried out in the system of generalized manipulation under Stalinism should not conceal the important fact that the system of generalized manipulation is also set up and enforced in another, ostensibly democratic, refined and much less conspicuous and shocking manner.

The system of universal manipulations as an essential characteristic of the twentieth century is the developed and perfected system of commerce typical of the nineteenth century. In that sense our century is the continuation of the past century, since, despite a series of significant and historically important revolutionary efforts and events, until now we have not transcended the bases from which originate both the system of universal commerce, exchange, utilitarianism, and alienation and the system of universal manipulation and manipulability that decisively determines the prospects of our time. The most diverse ideologies and different forms of false consciousness conceal these bases and origins so that, on the one hand, those very phenomena which, despite their diversity, have a great deal in common (seemingly) oppose each other as quite antagonistic and exclusive, while, on the other hand, they obfuscate the nature of that revolutionary or radical transformation that could be and is a real historical alternative to the current system of universal manipulation in all of its guises and historical forms.

I do not maintain that between that which is called Stalinism—or enlightened and reformed Stalinism—and that which is defined in the West as mass society, affluent society, consumer society, there are not essential differences, and that both phenomena do not belong to totally different socioeconomic formations. However, I ask—why do false consciousness and the manipulation of man play such an important role in both; I have come to the conclusion that the base and source that makes both phenomena possible is a latent and unclarified common "conceptualization" of man and reality. By

the word "conceptualization" we are not referring here to theoretical consciousness, but rather to a definitely real and factual separation of man and being, a definite reality which is fixed in positions, in intersubjective relations, in man's relationship to things and nature, in the manner of discovering truth, and in the relationship between truth and untruth. It is a reality that is reproduced in the everyday lives of millions of people, on the basis of which people form their assumptions regarding themselves and the world. Characteristic of the system of universal manipulability is not only the dominance of false consciousness in people's assumptions about themselves and the world, but also—in particular and primarily—a diminishing and regressing ability to distinguish truth from falsehood and a massive lack of interest, or dulled interest in distinguishing between truth and untruth, good and evil.

The natural opposition of the known affirmation regarding the antagonistic stance of some epochs to art is the second assumption—that certain societies can live without truth; that they do not require it in order to exist. Hundreds of works of art do not refute this affirmation, but rather confirm it, since their very existence proves that artistic production and creativity cannot alter the unpoetic and unaesthetic basis of an epoch or the prosaic atmosphere of everyday life. In this way methodically provided acquisition of erudition and the colossal accumulation of knowledge confirm rather than repudiate the second affirmation, since they document the powerlessness of modern science in the face of the fact that certain societies promote science and utilize scientific knowledge, while at the same time massively and constantly conjuring up mystification and false consciousness as an indispensable condition for their own existence.

In a system of universal manipulativeness man loses the ability and the need to differentiate; that is, both the ability and the need to discern truth from untruth and good from evil. The system of manipulativeness is a system of indifference and apathy, where truth mixes with falsehood and good with evil. Apathy elevated to a governing and constitutional category of reality signifies the identification of truth with untruth, good with evil, the lofty with the base, and, accordingly, universal leveling with universal disparagement. All is equally worthy and worthless because everything forfeits its own value and intrinsic meaning. False consciousness in a system of generalized manipulation is not, therefore, founded on untruth and lies (which are different from truth), but rather on the blending, the merging—the inseparable mixture—of truth and untruth, of good and evil. In that system indifference appears, on the one hand, as the everyday environment in which people transformed into masses live and act, while on the other hand, it appears as the inability and lack of interest in differentiation: apathy, dullness, obfuscation, a deadening of sensitivity, feeling, and reason.

The system of universal manipulation is founded on the technical arrangement of reality. Technical reason organizes reality as an object to be subdued,

sized up, disposed of, surpassed. In order that man (and along with man, things, nature, ideas, sensitivity) might become an integral part of the system of universal manipulability, first of all a fundamental epic change must be carried out. This is a change in which being is reduced to existing, the world to *res extensa*, nature to the object of exploitation or to an aggregate of physical—mathematical formulas. It is the transformation of man into a subject bound by a corresponding object to which being, the world, and nature have been reduced. Truth is reduced to exactitude of usefulness, etc., dialectics to a mere method or aggregate of rules, and, finally, to an entirely technical entity. That fundamental and epic reduction becomes the presupposition for the continuation and dominance of apathy in the system of universal manipulativeness.

Man is integrated into that system as a manipulable individual. One of the great illusions of modern man that makes up the specific false consciousness is the preconception that reality (being) can be organized as an object, as the focus of exploitation as something in existence for us to subdue, dispose of, and that we, despite all that, remain outside such an arrangement. Man is in fact always integrated in an appropriate manner via this arrangement into this system as its integral part, subject to its logic. If, therefore, modern man senses the problematic aspect of his position and is aware of it through expressions such as frustration, revulsion, bewilderment, ennui, nonsense, and alienation, and if he attempts to explain these phenomena sociologically, psychologically, or historically, he is dealing only with consequences. His examination does not get to the heart of the matter, to the basis, although he may uncover much of significance and value.

Technical reason has arranged reality not only as the object of dominance, usefulness, calculation, and allocation, as the realm of that which extends before us, that which can be basically inspected and brought under control, but rather also as perfectibility (the possibility of perfecting) and as a false infinity. From the standpoint of technological reason, all is a provisional transitory phase, since all that exists is merely the imperfect forerunner of that which will be, and so on, to infinity. Everything that is is merely relative with respect to the infinite process of perfecting and improving. From the perspective of 1984, the present is not only imperfection but it is also a mere point of transition, a passing stage. Absolute perfectibility (the possibility of perfecting), as a false infinity in an endless process of perfecting, undoes all and deprives all—things, people, ideas—of their own meaning and intrinsic value, and lends to all a significance and worth only in the context and from the point of view of this endless process. Everything possess meaning and value only as the passing phase of a process.

But if in that false infinity everything loses its inner meaning, and things are de-reified and people are reified—everything is indifferent since it is changeable and manipulable—then nihilism emerges as the consequence and logical outcome of the aforementioned fundamental leveling upon which the

system of manipulativeness is based.

We hope that it is not necessary to emphasize the fact that the term "technical rationality" is used here in a philosophical sense, and that we do not intend to belittle in any way the meaning of technology and of technological thought. Contemporary humanity cannot live without technology, and technical progress is one of the prerequisites for the liberation of man. However, both prevalent preconceptions regarding technology today—both an uncritical faith in the omnipotence of technology and of technological progress that in and of itself must bring freedom to man, and a romanticized vision of technology and fear that it will enslave man—conceal technology's essence. The essence of technology is not machines and automatons, but rather a technical rationality that organizes reality as a system of allocating, analyzing and perfecting. However strange it may appear to the common viewpoint, much more has been said about the essence of technology by Hegel's "false infinity," Condorcet's "perfectibility," Kant's study on means and ends, and Marx's analysis of capital than by the most rigorous examination of technology and of technical research and discovery. Machines do not threaten man. The enslaving domination of technology over mankind does not mean the revolt of machines and automatons against man. In this technological terminology people as yet only dimly perceive the danger that threatens them if technological knowledge is equated with general knowledge; if technical rationality takes over reality to such an extent that all that which is nontechnological, that which cannot be allocated, manipulated, or calculated, is pitted against itself and against man as nonreason.

In that context it is clear that dialectical reasoning, as the antithesis of rationality, does not signify a repudiation of technical reasoning, but rather the definition of the framework and boundaries within which technology and technical rationality are valid and justified. In other words: dialectical reasoning is, above all, the elimination of the mystification that identifies technical rationality with rationality in general or absolutizes the accuracy and validity of technical reasoning. In that context dialectical reasoning appears, primarily, as critical reflection that heralds the destruction of mystification and of the pseudoconcrete,[1] and seeks to portray reality as it truly is, to return to all its actual intrinsic meaning. Dialectics thus construed is not, of course, merely a method, much less an aggregate of rules or a mere totalization; neither is it limited to sociohistoric reality. Instead, it originates in an environment of critical demystifying reflection, and is therefore closer to wisdom than to the skilled application of certain rules of thought. It is simultaneously linked intrinsically to the problem of man and the world, to that of being, truth, and time.

In Czechoslovakia, along with the bankruptcy of a specific ruling sector and of a specific policy, the system of universal manipulation has also experienced a crisis, and the concealed bases on which it (the system) rests

have been revealed. From that fact the reason is clear why humanistic socialism cannot be merely a political or economic entity, although what is primarily at issue here is to resolve the political distortions and economic difficulties. Humanistic socialism emerges as a revolutionary, humanistic, and liberating alternative to any and all deformations of the system of universal manipulation and, for that reason, it rests on a completely different foundation and entails an absolutely different conceptualization of man, nature, truth, and history.

In every crisis everything is again theoretically examined and analyzed, and things that once seemed to be resolved and clear have long ceased to be obvious and appear problematical; that is, as vital questions that must forever and always be examined and analyzed. The phenomenon of socialism itself belongs among those questions. It is surprising that, after all the experiences, the question reemerges: What exactly is socialism? That question does not just allude to the desire to have all the cruelty and inhumanity committed in the name of socialism be unequivocally eliminated, but also signifies that the meaning of socialism has to be reexamined. It appears, indeed, that the practical tasks and difficulties, as well as the simple dwelling on definitions and on the enumeration of forms, clouded the historical significance of socialism so that practical theoretical pragmatism and utility overshadowed and thrust into the background the liberating sense of socialism as a humanistic and revolutionary alternative to oppression, to misery, abuse, injustice, lies, barbarity, war, the denigration of man and the crushing of his dignity, lack of freedom, and apathy. At every stage of its development, in every manifestation and historic form, socialism must always be construed and defined in relation to this liberating significance. Thereby, dialectics, revolutionary qualities, criticism, and humanism become the very integral content of socialism since we must evaluate each stage attained, each real endeavor, historical form of elaboration in relation to that integral meaning. This at the same time offers us the possibility in each endeavor, in each historical form and stage of socialism, to differentiate that which corresponds to socialism and belongs to it from that which betrays socialism, does not correspond to it, and is but a historical parasite of socialism or its deformation.

The Czechoslovak events can lead to a certain misunderstanding if we are not clear regarding the significance and content of the categorization given those events. In Czechoslovakia the current process is called democratization and rehabilitation. From this terminology we can gather that what is at issue here are events directed at the past, the meaning of which is to rectify, ameliorate, and introduce justice in the past; and, second, that democratization

and democracy are to be added to socialism as something external and accessory, as a foreign body transplanted to socialism. In the Czechoslovak events we are dealing with a complex link of a return to the past along with the creation of that which is new and of the future. And this is taking place under circumstances wherein it is increasingly clear that by no stretch of the imagination was all that took place in this country, from 1945 on, a necessary and inevitable phase on the road to socialism. Certain phases of that development were a detour, while many initiatives were proven to be historical error, so that present—day Czechoslovakia is distinguished from its immediate past in that it is continuing that which is indisputably revolutionary and socialistic, while rejecting all that was error and distortion.

It is obvious that the socialization of the means of production[2] and the rule of the working class are those revolutionary currents which socialist Czechoslovakia will not reject and which are and remain the presuppositions of the contemporary revolutionary process. More specifically, they emerge as an indispensable stage of the revolution, beyond which follows the next stage experienced by Czechoslovakia today. The significance of this stage is not only the elimination of the deformations of the past and the transformation of the police—bureaucratic dictatorship into socialist democracy, but rather at the same time the type of development in socialism that would be in accordance with its intrinsic liberating and humanistic meaning.

Contemporary events in Czechoslovakia should show—assuming the experiment succeeds—that socialism and democracy are intrinsically linked. That which we call democratization today, and which on the historical continuum occurs just at this stage, corresponds to the integral nature of socialism. This is true not simply because socialism projects all that is valuable and progressive that was produced in previous times, including the era of democracy, but also because the working class under socialism can have a political and guiding role only if the freedoms of expression, press, assembly, and contract flourish. Without these freedoms, workers become a manipulated mass, and the bureaucracy usurps and preempts their role as a political force.

One of the basic characteristics of today's rebirth in Czechoslovakia is the establishment, under a favorable constellation, of a revolutionary alliance of workers and intellectuals, an alliance to which each sector brings its special traits and in which they exert a reciprocal influence. That alliance is based on the awareness that a revolutionary socialistic intelligentsia can, indeed, be a catalyst, but that alone—without support from or a bond with the people, particularly with the working class—it cannot shape events into that overall entity that transforms the structure of society. The alliance is also based on the awareness that the working class is vitally interested in freedom and the truth of information and speech, interested in the destruction of mystification and false consciousness. That alliance of workers and intellectuals is established

through dialogue, through transcending mistrust and mutual prejudice, in a common critique but in a personal mutual recognition in integrated assemblies of intellectuals and workers, in factories as in editorial offices and institutions of higher education. (One of the most impressive expressions of this association is found in the spontaneously organized workers' committees for the defense of freedom of the press and information.)[3]

The result of the current process of reform in Czechoslovakia must be the establishment and the legal and constitutional strengthening of socialist democracy as a political system based on the socialization of the means of production, In this system an empowered people, as the sole source of power, would manage public affairs so that workers would be not only the collective owners, but also managers and participants in the ownership of the factories, so that every citizen would be a truly and factually unalienated subject of political life, political rights, and responsibilities.

The basis of socialist democracy is not the anonymous masses, led and manipulated by an impugn ruling group (by a political bureaucracy), but rather free and equal socialist citizens as subjects of political life. In the contemporary events the seeds are being prepared that can be considered organic beginnings of the bases and mainstays of socialist democracy. These include: (1) a popular front as a sociopolitical alliance of workers, peasants, intellectuals, youth, and civil servants in a dynamic association elaborated through common political dialogue, through tension, struggle, and cooperation, with the possibility of opposition and forming an alternative on a socialist basis; (2) political democracy with freedoms of the press, assembly, contract, and association; and (3) workers' councils or councils of producers as the self-managing organization of the workers who are not only collective owners, but also the managers of social (socialized) property. In that sense we consider Czechoslovak socialist democracy to be an integral democracy and we believe that it can function as a true democracy only with the cooperation and collaboration of these three basic elements. With the weakening or elimination of any of them, democracy will deteriorate or be transformed into mere formal democracy.

Contemporary events in Czechoslovakia brought their politics to the center of attention, made their politics of universal interest, but simultaneously warned of their problems. A natural element of politics is power, but the nature of politics determines what politics will be used for and who it will serve. Politics is not merely a reaction to an emerging or existing situation, and it is not simply a disposition of existing forces. Politics is supported not only by social forces, by sectors and classes, but also by the passions, reasoning, and sentiments of man. In every politics new forces are created and projected, and the nature of politics determines what will be awakened and touched in man, what will challenge people and what will hold them back or put them to sleep. In today's politics the most essential aspect is the education

of the people, because it is in political life that this or that potential or capability of people will be developed; this or that model of behavior, character, or participation will be exalted. It depends on the nature of politics whether in the struggle to seize or maintain power, in its implementation and application, impatience, private interests, prejudice, dark impulses, a diminution in the sense of justice and truth will be awakened in people or, on the contrary, an effort will be made to develop as their own forces or inclinations those tendencies, passions, capabilities, potentials, and possibilities of man that will enable him to live free and poetically. Politics is always the leading of people, but the nature of politics determines who will be led and who in fact is led: whether they will be manipulated, irresponsibly anonymous masses or people who desire to be free and responsible citizens.

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Translated by Julianne Clarke

Chapter 4

THE DIALECTICS OF MORALITY AND THE MORALITY OF DIALECTICS[1]

I

It is indispensable to differentiate between the philosophical currents that are in principle capable of resolving all essential problems of man and of the world, but which, owing to a shortage of time, concentrate solely on some of those problems—leaving to future generations the opportunity of gradually filling in the gaps—and those other problems for which the lack of time is only a refined way of acknowledging or concealing insufficient competence regarding certain issues. It is well known, for example, that Plekhanov's[2] theory of art never attained the depth of a real analysis of art or a definition of the very essence of some artistic work; instead it dissipated itself in a general description of its social conditions, creating the impression that, thereby, the conditions for resolving actual aesthetic issues would be established. In fact, it never got beyond the bounds of a preparatory stage, since its philosophical point of departure did not permit it to plumb the depths of the real problems of art. Plekhanov's ambitious research on social conditions and the economic equivalent of art did not really mark the indispensable starting point that enabled a further and deeper progression, but rather the internal limit that such analysis was unable to transcend. Will we Marxists, discussing the issues of morality, perhaps come to a similar situation? Is not our appraisal of morality, of moralistic socialism, and that particular suspicion which arouses in us everything related to morality simply a direct acknowledgment of our theoretical incapacity to confront a specific realm of human reality?

This question cannot be dismissed by a simple reference to the well-known discussion about Marxism and morality that took place in the socialist movement at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one since the nature and level of that discussion presented much more of an open problem than a response to the question posed. Actually this discussion revealed above all that if a social movement degrades itself to the point of merely using the

human masses to achieve this or that goal of power politics becomes a social technique that bases itself on the science of the mechanism of economic forces then human significance abandons the mere movement itself in order to establish itself in another sphere which transcends that movement—in the sphere of ethics.

From the moment when historical reality begins to be viewed as a field of strict causality and unidimensional determinism which the products of human praxis in the form of the economic factor control the people themselves, and from the moment when those factors with "fatal unavoidability" and an "iron law" steer history toward a certain goal, we are immediately in conflict with the issue: how it is possible to harmonize this inexorability with human endeavor and with the meaning of human activity in general. This antinomy between the laws of history and human history has not been resolved satisfactorily.[3] For a long time the answers oscillated within a framework of a mechanical way of thinking that ascribes to human activity either the role of the factor which accelerates a necessary historical process or the role of a separate indispensable element (similar to a gear or a transmission lever) of a functioning historical mechanism. Thus begins the vicious circle of theory and practice. The historical process was at its very inception dehumanized, that is, deprived of its human significance, naturalized and reified, that it might be the object of scientific examination that materialized as if one were dealing with a kind of social physics, which was called sociology or economic materialism, or with political activity construed as social technique.

Nonetheless, it was quickly observed that this is an impoverishment of a history of errors, and many voices were raised warning that man had been forgotten. But, since the criticism of this mistake was not sufficiently rigorous and never included the root of the problem—that is, the materialization and reification of history[4]—we have gone beyond merely noticing mistakes. The problems of the human significance of the historical process and social practices have been carried over to the sphere of individual activity. In that manner, a fetishistic interpretation of history was supplemented with ethics. We should not be surprised if as a result morality in relation to Marxism emerged in this situation either as a foreign element which constitutes a serious issue for the philosophical materialism of Marxist theory and, in fact, endows this theory with a quite different philosophical basis (for example, the effort to combine Kant with Marx), or as an external addition, whose superficial theoretical character still more forcefully emphasizes the secondary, accessory position of man in the naturalistic and scientific conceptualizations.

The ability or inability to resolve the issues of morality and art on the appropriate philosophical planes is always linked to a certain interpretation (or deformation) of dialectics, of praxis, of the theory of truth and of man, and of the general meaning of philosophy itself. A certain type of morality, a way of thinking and of moral procedure, corresponds to a certain concept of history,

of praxis, to a certain theory of dialectics, of truth and men. There exists, for example, a correlation that can be demonstrated between a mechanically construed dialectics, a pragmatic conception of truth and utilitarianism in morality. But even more important is the fact that a specific philosophical basis offers a greater or lesser possibility for elaborating actual problems, and, therefore, a connection exists between the philosophical basis of some conceptualization and the theoretical and practical boundaries that reasoning, originating from that conceptualization, cannot overcome.

One must not, in my opinion, seek the reasons for the failure of numerous attempts to analyze the problem of morality in Marxism in the fact that morality was underestimated, or that it was neglected in favor of pressing practical problems and that the analysis was coincidental and not systematic. One must seek them in the fact that in their very philosophical bases they were manifested in this or that central philosophical concept. Certain limitations were established and certain seeds of distortion incorporated which any examination, however profound and rigorous, could not surmount without transcending the limited nature of the philosophical basis itself at the same time. An evaluation of each distinct sphere of reality is at once a verification of the fundamental principles which are indispensable to the analysis itself. If there is no dialectical back-and-forth between the hypothesis of investigation and its results, if the analysis of phenomena and of distinct realms is founded on uncritically adopted hypotheses, and if the problems of separate spheres do not stimulate a deepening or a revision of general bases, then a known theoretical disagreement endures. That disagreement assumes that diverse fields of science are more effective in examining economic phenomena, analyzing art, revealing historical laws and speaking of morality, the farther they are from the field in which the unsettling question of consciousness is posed: Who is man?

The theory of man represents an indispensable condition for the elaboration of the question of morality. The theory of man is possible only in the relationship of man to the world, and that demands an elaboration of a corresponding model of dialectics, a resolution of the problem of time and truth, etc. I do not believe that I am thereby only emphasizing the importance of the task: Instead, above all, I am expressing the thought that the resolution of specific issues of morality is linked with regard to the existing situation, to the study and verification of the central philosophical issues of Marxism to the extent that we do not want to fall into banality or into an eclectic mix of scientism and moralism. The ability consistently to adopt principles that Marxism itself discovered is an elementary virtue of philosophical thought. Only in that manner can principles be justified, because only in that way does theory appropriate the indispensable universality that will not allow any retreat, and thereby enables progress of a necessary concrete nature since it also entails the

subject that studies and acts. That virtue is at the same time of the greatest usefulness in that it offers to theoretical elaboration a wealth of new points of view and at the same time it is the primary criterion for verifying the accuracy of its conclusions.

If Marxism abandons these principles, it renounces one of its greatest advantages. Marxism uncovered the contradiction between words and deeds in capitalist society, between toil and joy, reason and reality, external appearance and substance, truth and usefulness, expediency and conscience, individual interest and societal exigencies. At the same it continued systematically in that revealing criticism along the basic tendencies of European thought. Marxism described capitalist society as a dynamic system of contradictions, the heart, outcome, and basis of which are founded on the exploitation of hired labor, on the antagonism of class and capital. Marxism revealed this bacchanal of contradictions—however, the problem remained open as to how each of these contradictions can be resolved, and the doubt lingered as to whether a resolution of the contradictions of the capitalist world means simultaneously a resolution of the essential contradictions of human existence. And until Marxism applies materialistic dialectics in its own theory and practice, it generates by this neglect at least two serious consequences.

First: this omission creates a fertile ground on which revolutionary fervor, convinced that the revolution resolves all contradictions of human existence, can turn into revolutionary and postrevolutionary skepticism, that holds that the revolution has not resolved even one of these contradictions.

Second: Marxism has missed a great opportunity to rework one of the basic questions of dialectics, one on which Hegel stumbled, and one which has key significance for moral action. I am thinking of the goal of history or, in other terminology, the meaning of history.

For Marx, materialistic dialectics were a tool to reveal and describe the contradictions of capitalist society, but when the Marxists began to examine their own theory and practice, they disregarded materialism in favor of idealism, dialectics in favor of metaphysics, criticism in favor of apologetics. In this sense, we must understand fidelity to Marx as a return to consistent judgment and the application of materialistic dialectics to all phenomena of contemporary society, including both Marxism and socialism. At the same time it is necessary to pose and answer the question as to why in fact the aforementioned tendency toward apologetics, metaphysics, and idealism arises.

The first result of Marxist dialectics thus applied is the affirmation that the contradictions between word and deed, reason and reality, conscience and expediency, moral and historical actions, intentions and consequences, the subjective and the objective, where the antagonism between the working class and capital has been abolished. Does this mean, among other things, that capitalism is just a separate historical form of these contradictions that are, in

and of themselves, above history and exist, as such, in all societal configurations? Or has socialism existed for such a short time as both a movement and a society that, accordingly, we are not in a position to discern from the perspective of the existence or nonexistence of said contradictions all of the consequences that this new form of human association and societal management will have.

The answer to this question requires numerous intermediary elements, the existence and interrelation of which will lead to further exposition. Consequently I will content myself with the affirmation that the existence of such contradictions and their revelation shed new light on the actual relation between that which belongs to a class and that which belongs to the whole of humanity, between that which can be historically transformed and that which is intrinsic to all mankind, between the temporal and the eternal. In a word, they throw a new light on the question of what is man and what is social and human reality.

Also, since the issue of morality is inseparably linked to these questions, we arrive at a definition of the theoretical point of departure for our reflection regarding Marxist morality. We will continue, therefore, to explain the problems cited, beginning with the antinomy of: (a) man and the system, and (b) interiority and exteriority.

II

The very contact between two persons creates a kind of system. Or, more precisely, different systems establish different types of relations among people, which are expressed in their own elementary form and can be described by the contact of a couple of standard human beings. Jacques the fatalist and his teacher in the case of Diderot, the master and the servant in the case of Hegel, the cultured lady and the shrewd merchant in the case of Mandeville, constitute historical models of human relations in which the relationship between one person and another is defined by the position each occupies in the social system as a whole.

What is man like, what is his physical and intellectual makeup, what is the nature that this or that system requires for it to be able to function? If one system "creates" and assumes people whom instinct compels to seek advantage, people who rationally or irrationally perform, seeking the greatest yield (of utility and money), it means that these elementary human traits suffice for the system to function. The reduction of man to a certain abstraction is not an original contribution of theory, but rather of historical reality itself. Economics is a system of relations in which man is constantly transformed into economic man. When he by his own actions enters into economic relations, he is drawn independently of his will and consciousness into certain relations wherein he functions as *homo economicus*.[5] Economics is a system that seeks

to turn man into economic man. In economics man is active only insofar as the economy is active, that is, to the extent that it makes a specific abstraction out of man. It promotes and stresses some of his attributes, while neglecting others as unnecessary for its functioning.

The social system—be that in the sense of a socioeconomic organization, economics, public life, or partial interactions—is constituted within a movement and is preserved thanks to the social activity of individuals, that is, thanks to their behavior and performance. Also, since on the one hand, that system defines the character, scope, and capacity for such activity by individuals, a complicated case is established on the basis of which the system is made to function quite independently of individuals. On the other hand, the illusion prevails that the concrete initiative and behavior of each individual is unrelated to the existence and operation of the system.

Romantic contempt for the role of the system forgets that the dilemma of man, of his freedom and morality, is always contained within the relationship between man and the system. Man always exists within a system, and, as part of it is exposed to the tendency of being reduced to certain functions and forms. Man, however, is something beyond a system, and, as man, cannot be reduced to this or that existing active system. The existence of concrete man is situated in a space between the inability of being reduced to a system and the historical possibility of overcoming the system itself, while the real integration and practical function is situated in a system of circumstances and relations.

* * *

Materialistic criticism is the confrontation of that which man as an individual of this or that system can do, must do, and that which he in fact does do with the conduct that is prescribed to him or interpreted in the moral code. In that sense it is good to recognize as fully accurate the thought that the morality of modern society is anchored in economics, construed of course not in the common sense of an economic factor, but rather in the sense of an historical system of the production and reproduction of social wealth. A certain moral codex proclaims that man is by nature good and that human relations are built on mutual trust. The system of actual relations among people, achieved under this or that economic model, in political or public life, is on the contrary, based on a mistrust toward people and can only be maintained owing to the fact that it promotes the dark side of human nature.

That is the contradiction between morality and economics which Marx had in mind when he disclosed the causes of the fragmentary nature and reification of man in capitalist society: "It stems from the very nature of estrangement that each sphere applies to me a different and opposite yardstick—ethics one and political economy another—for each is a specific estrangement of man and focuses attention on a particular field of estranged relation to the other."[6]

Since morality presents man with certain demands, and economics others, since the former of these spheres (morality) seeks that man be good and love his fellow men, while the other (economics, public life) forces him to view others as competitors and potential enemies in the struggle for economic advantage, in the effort to insure for himself a social position in the race for power, actual human life passes through a series of conflicting situations, and, at the moment of concrete resolution in each of them, man takes on a different guise, another meaning. One moment he is a coward, another he is a hero: on one occasion he appears as a hypocrite, on still another as a naive idealist: first he is an egotist, then a philanthropist, etc.

From the time of Pascal and Rousseau in European culture one question has constantly and unavoidably been posed: Why are people not happy in the modern world? Does this question possess some kind of significance for Marxists as well, and is it not perhaps connected to the relationship between economics and morality? That issue takes on key significance for all philosophical and cultural currents that acknowledge, in this way or that, the link between human existence and the creation and definition of meaning. This fully applies as well to Marxism, which interprets history as the humanization of the world and as the imprinting of human meaning on the substance of nature.

Why are people not happy in the modern world?[7] Because they are the slaves of selfishness, replies Rousseau; because they are conceited, answers Stendhal.[8] How shall Marxism respond to this question? Will it shift all responsibility for misfortune to misery and material deprivation? Common "sociologism" and economism which have not grasped the philosophical meaning of praxis and seek in vain an authentic mediation between economics and morality think in these categories. From a simplistic viewpoint, the facts of poverty, of material deprivation, and of exploitation, however justifiably emphasized, forfeit their real place in the modern world, since they are separate from its global structure. Why are people not happy in the modern world? That question does not imply that misfortune affects people and that since this happens on unexpected occasions such as illness, the loss of a loved one, or premature death—it interrupts the course of their lives. Neither does it mean the romantic illusion whereby modern man has lost the wealth he possessed in former times. The historical contradiction between truth and misfortune is reflected in the aforementioned question. He who knows truth and sees reality as it truly is, cannot be happy; he who is happy in the modern world does not recognize truth and views reality through a prism of convention and lies. Revolutionary praxis must resolve this antinomy.

Stendhal's "conceit" and Rousseau's "selfishness" touch the very essence of the mechanism of the behavior and performance of modern man, who is driven from one thing to another, from one indulgence to another, due to the absolute insatiability that transforms people, things, values, time, into mere

ephemeral objects or fleeting states lacking any integral meaning, and whose only significance in fact lies either behind or beyond them.

Everything is a mere stimulus or pretext for moving on to something different, so that man becomes a being driven by a never-satisfied craving. But that craving is not authentic; it does not originate from the spontaneous relation between things and people, but rather from an attending comparison and confrontation that enables man to measure himself against others, and others against himself.

In any event, that which emerges in the realm of human behavior and performance as motivation exists in the objective world as the "law of things." The lust for profit that appears in the conscience of a capitalist as the motive for his actions is the internalization of the process of increasing capital.

Why are people not happy in the modern world? Rousseau and Stendhal respond in psychological categories. Marx replies with a description of a system in which conceit, selfishness, metaphysical desire (Girard), resentment (Scheler), the competition and emptiness, the transformation of the greatest good into a phantom, and the promotion of the phantom to the level of the greatest good begin as the internalization of the economic structure. The transformation of all values into mere passing moments in the general and absolute race for more distant values has as its consequence the emptiness of life. The degeneration of the notion of happiness into physical comfort and that of reason into a rationalizing manipulation of people and things, that everyday atmosphere of modern life that converts means into ends and ends into means is anchored in an economic structure expressed in a simple formula: money—goods—more money. If the modern world—within which the question "Why is man not happy?" originates—is defined explicitly by the phrase "leveling instead of real community" (Marx, *Grundrisse*) historical praxis must transform the structure of the world in order to define it as "real community instead of leveling."

In everyday life, truth exists side by side with lies, good side by side with evil. In order that morality might endure in this world it is necessary to distinguish good from evil. It is necessary to place good in opposition to evil, and evil in opposition to good. Man established this distinction by his own conduct, and as long as his behavior is concerned with this distinction, man is on the level of a moral life. As long as human life unfolds in the light and dark of good and evil—that is, without a clear distinction, where good and evil mingle in a false sum whole—then life is unfolding outside of morality and constitutes mere existence.

The dimension of life in which man carries on his work, assumes public and private tasks without differentiating evil from good, can be adequately summed up in the expressions: organization, obedience, diligence at work, etc. Only if we neglect this fact can we be amazed that persons who are "anstandig" [decent] and "tuchtig" [worthy] in their own family circle, in

their own professional group and community, can become criminals once they go beyond this sphere, when they operate outside it.

Moral behavior consists of differentiating good and evil. Does such behavior presuppose prior knowledge of good and evil, or is the awareness of good and evil and its differentiation acquired through action and involvement? Does not, perhaps, morality start with good intentions, a clear conscience, a moral soul, or is it rather constituted solely as the result of behavior, its fruits and consequences?

The "Beautiful Soul" embodies one pole of this antimony. Since the Beautiful Soul fears the consequences of her own potential conduct and wishes to avoid them, i.e., since she rejects doing evil to others and to herself, she retreats within herself, and her behavior is merely the activity of her inner self, the activity of her conscience. That conscience knows itself to be moral because it has never done evil to anyone. From that is derived her authority to judge all that is outside herself according to her own criterion; that is, to evaluate the world from the standpoint of a clear conscience. The Beautiful Soul has committed no evil because she has not acted. But precisely because she has not acted and because she doe not act, she suffers evil and witnesses it. Her position of a clear conscience is the painful observance of evil.

The "Commissar" is the antithesis of the Beautiful Soul. The Commissar criticizes the clear conscience of the Beautiful Soul for its hypocrisy, knowing well that every action is subject to the laws that transform the necessary into the coincidental and vice versa, so that every rock that is dropped from the hand becomes a devilish rock.

Rule One of the Commissar is activity to stamp out evil. The Commissar sees an opportunity in the world to impose his own reforming efforts. Because he wishes to reeducate people, but in that transformation he does not reeducate himself, in carrying out his activity he is reaffirmed in the prejudice that the more passive the object of such transformation and reeducation is, the more successful is his activism. The activity of the Commissar thus elicits the passivity of people, and passivity thus constituted in the end becomes a condition for the further existence and justification of the meaning of the Commissar's activism. Thereby, reforming intentions become deforming practice.

In some of his traits the Commissar is reminiscent of a revolutionary but it is only an illusory resemblance. To the degree that this resemblance actually exists, it nonetheless pertains sooner to the genesis of this kind of activity, and from that standpoint the Commissar represents a stage in the process that leads from the revolutionary to the bureaucrat.

It is important to define that type of moral activity because it illuminates the mechanism of the process through which dialectical unity deteriorates into ossified antinomy. That process concerns us further in our discussion, but suffice it for now that I note its existence. In lieu of revolutionary praxis,[9] in which people change conditions and the educators are educated, there emerges

the old antinomy of people and relations according to which people are strictly divided into two ironclad, radically separate groups. One of them is "elevated above society," as Marx says in his Third Thesis on Feuerbach, and embodies the intellect and conscience of that society.

The antithesis of the Beautiful Soul and the Commissar expresses the antinomy of "moralism" and utilitarianism. In order to differentiate between good and evil, the decisive authority for moralism is the voice of conscience, while for utilitarian realism the judgment of history is accorded this role. In that antinomy and in that mutual isolation, dictions are exceptionally problematic. How can I know that the voice of conscience does not lie and how, within the parameters of my own conscience, can I confirm its veracity? Am I at all in a position, within the parameters of my own conscience, to evaluate whether or not that voice is in fact mine or, on the contrary, an alien voice that speaks in my name and uses my conscience as its tool? Or is this superior authority constituted by the judgment of history? And is not the verdict of that judgment equally as problematical as the voice of conscience? The judgment of history always arrives late, post festum. It can judge and hand down a verdict, but it cannot rectify an error. Before the court of history *faits accomplis* can be punished as crimes and lawlessness, but the court cannot bring their victims back to life or alleviate the suffering that the victims endured prior to their deaths. The court of history is not the definitive judge. Each phase of history possesses its own judgment, whose prejudices are left to the revisions carried out by subsequent stages of history.

An absolute verdict of some historical judgment can be made relative by a successive period in the course of history. History's judgment lacks the authority of the "Last Judgment" of Christian theology, and, above all, it does not have its definitive and irrevocable character. The "Last Judgment" is one of the elements which gives to Christian morality its absolute character and saves it from relativism. God is the second element of its absolute character. Once the theological concept of the "Last Judgment" is transformed into the worldly notion of the end of history, which criticism will later reveal to be the direct capitulation of philosophy in the face of theology, once it is affirmed that "God is dead," the founding pillars of absolute moral conscience collapse, and moral relativism triumphs.

In the mutual relationships of people and in the relations of between one person and another, the Christian God plays the role of absolute mediator. God is the mediator who makes another person my neighbor. Does, then, the disappearance of God mean the end of mediated relations among people and the establishment of direct relations? If God is dead and all is permitted man, are the relations among people based on a directness in which their real characteristics and true nature are manifested and realized? As long as a materialistic interpretation of the statement "God is dead" does not exist, and there is no materialistic explanation of the story of this death, it is obvious that we will

continue to be victims of vulgar misunderstandings and idealistic mystifications. God is the metaphysical mediator in human relations. The withdrawal or elimination of this form of metaphysics still does not (automatically) abolish mediation and metaphysics. Metaphysical mediation can be replaced by physical mediation which metaphysics only originates. This holds true whether one is dealing in our time with violence in its overt and covert form of absolute mediation in the relations among people (the state, terror), or whether one is dealing with society as reified morality that has become independent from its members (with regard to concrete individuals) prescribing for them taste, lifestyle, morals, conduct, etc.

III

The Christian concept of God and the Last Judgment gave each action a definite and unequivocal character. Each action was placed definitively and unequivocally either on the side of good or that of evil, because there existed an absolute judge who is concerned with differentiation, since every action was in direct relation to eternity, i.e., to the Last Judgment. With the destruction of these notions, the world of clarity disappeared, and ambiguity arose in its place. Since history did not hold back and did not rush toward an apocalyptic climax, but rather, on the contrary, was forever open to new possibilities, people's actions lost their unequivocal nature.

The fact that history has no end is the reason that not one action is definitively exhausted in its direct consequences; this conflicts with the desire of the human spirit for clarity and simplicity. The multiplicity of interpretations of reality which unfolds before each action as the possibility of good and evil, and which forces people to be, comes into conflict with the metaphysical aspiration of man which is based on the belief that the triumph of good and truth must be assured, that is, entrusted to one power which exceeds the conduct and rationality of the individual.

However, since the victory of good and right is not absolutely guaranteed in history, and since man cannot in one single phenomenon read a justified certainty of this triumph of good over evil, the metaphysical wish can be satisfied only outside of rationality and logical arguments, i.e., in faith. However, since faith in God in the modern age is an outmoded element, it is exchanged for faith in a metaphysical compensation—the future. For this faith the future takes on the character of a metaphysical illusion, and this faith transforms the future into an alienated, reified future.

When dialectics revealed the contradictions of modern reality and presented them as a gigantic system of antinomies, it appears that it was frightened by its own daring and by the assumption that no means for the resolution of these contradictions exists within reach; aspiring not to fall into an ironic skepticism at any cost, it offered up its resolution—the future.

The future is the decree that confirms the triumph of good over evil, or, in other words, the triumph of good over evil is attained with the help of the judgment of the future. And it seems that the less one period of cadres truly resolves its problems and antagonisms, the more it tries to leave their resolution to the future. This metaphysical faith in the future devalues the present, deprives it—as the sole reality of the more empiric individual—every authentic significance; it degrades it to a mere temporary element and the mere function of something that has not yet come into being. Nonetheless, if total meaning is placed in a world which doe not exist, and if the world that does exist—which is for the existing individual the sole real world—is deprived of its own significance, and accepted only in its functional connection with the future, we again come into conflict with the antinomy of the real and the illusory worlds.

The future as a mythological decree of truth and goodness in which refuge is sought in the face of pessimistic skepticism, itself comes into being as skepticism because it degrades the true empirical world of man to a mere world of illusions, while it places the actual authentic world precisely where the experience and possibilities of empiric individuals end.

The official optimism that relativizes contemporary existing evil by placing it in relation to the nonexistent absolute good of future constitutes a tacit, hypocritical pessimism.

Whether the greatest values are attributed to a future that the empiric individual cannot experience, or are anchored in an ideal world or transcendence, in both cases man is deprived of freedom and the possibility to establish those values himself today. The inability to establish the highest values in the human empiric world necessarily leads to the ultimate form of skepticism—nihilism.

In a world from which the highest values have disappeared or where they exist solely as an unestablished sphere of ideals, in such a world man's very life is deprived of meaning, and mutual relations among people are constituted as absolute indifference. In a world in which the conduct of each individual is not substantively linked to the possibility of realizing good, moral guidelines become hypocrisy, and the individual achieves a unity of himself and of the good in his own actions in the form of tragic conflict and as tragedy.

Dialectics can justify morality if it is itself moral. The morality of dialectics is contained in its consistency, which in a destructive, all-encompassing process does not falter in the face of anything or anyone. The nature and scope of the spheres which dialectics leaves outside of that process is the measure of both its inconsistency and its "immorality."

In connection with our dilemma it is indispensable that we underscore three basic aspects of the destructive and all-encompassing dialectical process.

Dialectics is, above all the destruction of the pseudoconcrete, in which all petrified and reified formations of the material and spiritual world are displaced, revealing historical creations and human practice.

Second, dialectics is the revelation of the contradictions in things themselves, i.e. the activity that points out and describes these contradictions instead of concealing and mystifying them.

Third, dialectics is the expression of the movement of human praxis. This movement can be defined in the terms of classical German philosophy as resuscitation and rejuvenation (Verjungung)—whereby these concepts represent the antithesis of atomization and deadening—or it can be defined in modern terms as a totalization.

The contradictions of human reality are transformed into petrified antinomies if they are deprived of the unifying force that makes human praxis a totalization and resuscitation. Ossified antinomies are actual historical facts or, more exactly, historically existing formations of human praxis. Genuine dialectics begins where the transition from petrified antinomies to a dialectical unity of contradictions, or the disintegration of the dialectical into sclerotic antinomies, is discovered and accomplished. Materialistic dialectics requires the unity of that which pertains to classes and that which pertains to the whole of humanity for the theory and, of course, the practice of the revolutionary movement. The actual historical process, however, flows in such a way that unity is either established simply through the totalization of antinomies or the opposite, so that this unity deteriorates into separate and opposing poles. The isolation of that which pertains to classes from that which pertains to all mankind leads to sectarianism and bureaucratic mystification and to the deformation of socialism, while the separation of that which pertains to all of humanity from that which belongs to classes leads to opportunism and reformist illusions. In the first instance, isolation produces brutal amoralism, and, in the second, impotent moralism—i.e., in the first instance it introduces the deformation of reality and in the second, capitulation in the face of distorted reality.

There exists, of course, a difference between whether the dialectical unity of that which pertains to classes or of that which pertains to the whole of mankind is achieved solely in thought, or in real life. In the first case, one is dealing with a theoretical labor that requires intellectual effort; in the second case, we are dealing with a historical process that is carried out with sweat and blood, by twists and turns and by chance. The unity of theory and practice in this instance means the relation between the tasks which are recognized as possibilities of human progress and the possibilities, capabilities, and inevitabilities of their resolution.

Inasmuch as dialectics does not expose the contradictions of human reality with a view toward capitulating in the face of them or observing them as antinomies in which the individual is forever and always trapped, and since dialectics is also not the deceptive totalization that leaves it to the future to resolve these antagonisms, then for it the central issue is the link between the disclosure of the contradictions and the possibility of their resolution. But, as

long as praxis is construed as practice, as manipulation by people, or as the mere technical relation to nature, the problem is unresolvable, because alienated and reified practice is not totalization and reanimation. In that sense it is not the creation of a "beautiful totality," but rather the atomization and deadening that necessarily produces the petrified antinomies of expediency and morality, of advantage and truth, of means and ends, of the truth of the individual and the demands of an abstract whole.

The problem of morality thus becomes the problem of the relation between reified practice and humanized praxis, between fetishized practice and revolutionary praxis.

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Translated by Julianne Clarke

Chapter 5

HAŠEK AND KAFKA, OR, THE WORLD OF THE GROTESQUE

Hašek and Kafka
1883–1922/23

KAFKA AND HAŠEK[1]

Hašek and Kafka were born in the same year in the same city. They both spent most of their lives in Prague, and it was in Prague, at about the time of the First World War, that they wrote the works for which they became world-renowned. They died within one year of each other, at the beginning of the twenties. But of course these facts are routine, superficial, and coincidental, and in themselves don't tell us very much about the relationship between Hašek and Kafka.

We can invert our perspective on the problem, though, and ask what kind of environment gave rise to two such different phenomena as Hašek and Kafka. What kind of Prague is Kafka's Prague, and what is the Prague of Hašek? Both men enriched the fame of their birthplace. Their work is linked to Prague, and to a certain extent Prague is depicted in it. Švejk's "odyssey under the honorable escort of two soldiers with bayonets" takes him from the Hradcany garrison jail along Neruda Street to Malá Strana and over the Charles Bridge to Karlin. It is an interesting group of three people: two guards escorting a delinquent. From the opposite direction, over the Charles bridge and up to Strahov, another trio makes its way. This is the threesome from Kafka's *Trial*: two guards leading a "delinquent," the bank clerk Josef K., to the Strahov quarries, where one of them will "thrust a knife into his heart." Both groups pass through the same places, but meeting each other is impossible. Švejk was let out of jail—as is the custom—early in the day, and he and his guards made the journey just described before noon, while Josef K. was led in the evening hours by two men wearing top hats, "in the moonlight."

But let's imagine that these two groups were to meet. They pass each other without paying attention, because Joseph K. is preoccupied with studying the physiognomy and behavior of his mysterious attendants, while Švejk is completely absorbed in friendly conversation with his guards. On the other hand, the two groups *might* look at each other as they meet. The look would be one that does not see. People often look at each other without recognizing who they are. And indeed, who are they?

Josef K. finds Hašek's trio excessively comical and only that, without the deeper unexpected meaning that deciphers the world of farce; similarly, Josef Švejk sees Kafka's trio as a comical apparition which obscures the real, grotesquely tragic fate of Josef K. Both see only the external appearance of the other, and so they are indifferent to each other.

This is one imaginable encounter of Hašek and Kafka, one which touches only the surface. From the authors, however, we might proceed to a second level, that of their work. Is it at all possible to compare and to connect the work of Hašek and the work of Kafka? At first glance there seems to be no relation. Kafka is read to be interpreted, while Hašek is read to make people laugh. There exists dozens, even hundreds, of interpretations of Kafka. His work is prceived and accepted as full of problems and problematical, as enigmatic, puzzlelike and cryptical, accessible only through decoding—in other words, through interpretation. Hašek's work, on the other hand, seems completely clear and understandable to everybody; his work is naturally transparent, provoking laughter and nothing more. But isn't this naturalness and transparence only illusory, and in this sense deceitfully misleading?

Western interpreters have applied to Kafka's work a number of different methods of analysis, from psychoanalysis, structural analysis, sociological and anthropological research, and the search for theological, religious, and philosophical aspects, to the investigation of connections with the ideological worlds of Judaism, Christianity, of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and so on, thus exhausting the entire range of interpretive possibilities. In contrast, with regard to Hašek we seem to have one master key which unlocks all his work: the principle of "popular appeal" so celebrated in our country. However, Hašek's "popular appeal" does not illuminate his work; on the contrary, it hinders access to it, for it prevents us from understanding its essence.

What kind of sense is made by Hašek's work? Does *The Good Soldier Švejk* really lack a unified structure, and is its narrative fragmented? What is the point of all its anecdotes? Are there to be found, in Hašek's work, problems of time, of comedy, tragedy, and of the grotesque?

And who is Švejk?

WHO ŠVEJK IS NOT

Švejk is the servant of army chaplain Katz and later of the lieutenant Lukáš.

Masters give orders and servants carry them out. A master is an intention, and the servant is the realization of that intention. But since orders are so general and take a definite shape only when they are implemented, it is possible for the servant to turn against the master; during the carrying out of an order so many unforeseen circumstances may develop that the master can no longer recognize his idea in the servant's realization of it. The servant is only a tool of the master's intention, but because he acts, he creates a situation which is the reverse of the master's original intention. The master forces the servant to be attentive to him, and so the servant knows his master well; he knows his strengths and his weaknesses. It is enough for the master to have rank and power, but the servant must be inventive and enterprising. Who in this relationship of dependence is really the master, and who the servant? Who imposes his will on whom, and who is the one who acts?

In certain divisions of labor, the servant has only one role: he amuses the master. He then becomes a servant of a special kind—a court jester. He does no manual labor; instead, he works with his head, as an intellectual. Is a jester independent? He gives that impression. He speaks impertinently to the ruler, and he enjoys what is even in court society an unusual privilege, that of "telling the truth." The jester comments on what is going on around him and contributes his wit to the court scene. Because he's employed by the court, however, he has to play by the court rules: his insolence must be only the impertinence of a jester, and his truth is always the jester's truth. He can function in his role only as long as the others accept and respect him in that role. If he goes beyond the prescribed or the recognized and tolerated limits, he is no longer taken seriously, or, on the contrary, he begins to be taken too seriously; he becomes either boring and useless or he is exposed as an insolent troublemaker, a hypocrite, a malcontent. "Many rulers," as Erasmus of Rotterdam observed, "cannot even breakfast without a jester and prefer the company of jesters to that of philosophers, who have confidence in their erudition and who often offend the delicate ear of the sovereign with the grating truth."

Švejk is a servant, but he is not a jester. At times he acts like a crazy fool, but a fool becomes a jester only when he offers his madness in service to a ruler. When Švejk insolently speaks his fool's truth, he does not act as a servant, and the role that complements his is not that of a master but rather that of a bureaucrat. Lieutenant Dub, who is a petty official, doesn't understand jokes and can't even laugh; his only ambition is to drive Švejk to tears. A petty bureaucrat moves in a space that is sacred, inviolable, closely guarded. He is extremely suspicious of laughter. Whoever laughs, laughs at him. He is egocentric and irritable. He wants to watch over everything, and to have everything under his control. He tells people what they may laugh at and what they are allowed to look at.

"What's happened here?" One could hear the stern voice of Lieutenant Dub, as he stepped directly in front of Švejk.
"Humbly report, sir," answered Švejk for all of them, "we're having a look down."
"And what are you having a look at?" shouted Lieutenant Dub.
"Humbly report, sir, we're having a look down into the ditch."
"And who gave you permission to do that?"

Švejk is not the servant of this bureaucrat. His relationship to the Lieutenant Dub is not based on a direct personal dependency; instead, it is defined by a very complicated system of legal rules. Švejk is separated from Lieutenant Dub by the intricacy of the military hierarchy, which makes it impossible for the official to treat Švejk as a servant. Švejk and the official are of two different worlds that do not tolerate each other. Švejk, merely by his existence and physical presence, provokes the official, because he doesn't say what he's supposed to say. Švejk doesn't take part in the game. He doesn't want to be promoted and to have a career, and because of this he doesn't follow the rules of the game. Because he's not in the game, he spoils the game without knowing it; he is dangerous and suspect *against his will.*

What kind of relationship exists between Švejk and the person who plays against him, and what exactly is the role that complements his? Is he the servant of a master, is he jester to a ruler, is he the idiot in a relationship between a lunatic and petty bureaucrat? Or is he a modern Sancho Panza, that is, a servant without a master?

A GROTESQUE WORLD

In the county jail Švejk tells his fellow prisoners a story:

. . . you mustn't lose hope. It can still change for the better as the gypsy Janeček said in Pilsen, when in 1879 they put the cord around his neck for double robbery and murder. He was right in his guess, because at the very last moment they took him away from the gallows, as they couldn't hang him owing to its being the birthday of his Imperial Majesty . . . So they hung him the next day after the birthday had passed. But just imagine the luck the bastard had, because the day after that he was given clemency, and they had to give him a new trial as everything pointed to the fact that it was another Janeček who had committed the crime. So they had to dig him up from the prison graveyard and reinstall him in the Catholic graveyard at Pilsen. But then it came that he was Protestant, so then they took him to the Protestant cemetery and then. . . .

This passage, which is neither atypical nor unique, evokes in the reader mixed emotions: it provides laughter, but at the same time it chills. It is funny,

but it is also embarrassing. It evoked feelings that people prefer to avoid, feelings that people don't want to be aware of, that they don't attach any importance to, or that they discount as exceptional and accidental. The reader wants to be entertained, and so he doesn't let himself be disturbed by excesses and oddities in the author's narrative. In this small episode, it is not simply death that chills, and not simply the execution, but the nonsensical nature of the death and the absurdity of the execution. What people want to be protected from, what they avoid, what they want to rid themselves of, is not last rites, or death, or sorrow, but rather absurdity. We can't orient ourselves properly in the absurd; we lose self-confidence; we are unable to see casual relations.

This episode has, at the same time, another effect, exactly the opposite. It provokes laughter and merriment, and the emotions of mirth, humor, and gaiety make themselves felt first. A man smiles and laughs, and suddenly, *suddenly*, his laughter passes; his laugh freezes into a grimace and seems inappropriate to him. He was laughing, and within an instant he becomes aware that in fact nothing is funny. What provoked laughter and seemed to be funny is revealed—in the immediate flicker of time passing which we call suddenness—in a different light, and he feels ambushed by his own laughter. His own laughter embarrasses him. He turns inward, he withdraws into himself, he no longer attends to what is around him and in front of him but rather looks into himself: what was wrong? What did he do that was inappropriate? He laughed at something funny. But suddenly his laugh seems inappropriate, and his laughter suddenly begins to fade.

Depressed and made uneasy by his own behavior, he looks for the fault in himself, not in the object that first provoked his laughter and then changed the laughter into chill. The analysis of this subjective feeling brings us close to the very essence of things: the phenomenon itself acts as a time bomb. What the phenomenon at first revealed about itself and what affected the man (the viewer, the reader, or the listener) is suddenly reversed and becomes its own antithesis. The laughter disappears and turns into chill and horror. The man turns away from the object and toward himself; how can he laugh about something that isn't funny but is instead strange, alien, and even horrifying?

Is this terror and chill, this alienness and novelty a part of Hašek's work? And in what way is it a part? Is it only an episode, an exception, is it a marginal aspect, or is it more integrally related to the structure of his work? To this day, Hašek's Švejk is read (and discussed) in accordance with one particular interpretation. People accepted Švejk after the First World War, in the twenties and the thirties, as laughter over the horror experienced in the past and connected to a time that was never to return, and it is therefore taken as humorous rather than grotesque, and as satirical rather than tragic, it is idealized rather than dramatized. Josef Lada quite congenially illustrated that aspect of Švejk's books, and his illustrations are, accordingly, humorous, with the satirical (and poetic) accompaniment of Švejk. That Hašek however could have

been, and was, read differently, is attested by the drawings of George Grosz: they are as one-sided as Lada's illustrations and they emphasize exactly those aspects of the work that the Czech illustrator Lada did not see: terror, horror, grotesqueness, and grimace.[2]

Under the prevailing, idealized interpretation, certain important passages in Švejk are forgotten: one of the funniest chapters in the book, describing a sermon of the drunken chaplain Katz in the prison chapel, begins with an account of a prison practice: "When somebody refuses orders we drag him off into solitary and there we break all his ribs and let him lie there until he croaks. We have the right to do that." In another sentence the atmosphere of the period is evoked: "A procession would pass, headed by a man under military escort with his hands manacled and followed by a cart with a coffin on it." The shackled man goes on foot because he is an outcast. A *thing*, the coffin, representing the majesty of the mechanism, *follows* the prisoner *on a cart.*

Does this mean, then, that black humor is interspersed in Hašek's work, that terror is set beside laughter, that jokes alternate with sorrow? The absurd manifests itself as terror and horror and as comedy and humor. Terror is not set beside laughter; rather, both spring from the same source: from the world of the grotesque.

In Hašek's work the grotesque world is manifested:

in the reactions through which people exorcise terror, resist death, escape from boredom and struggle against absurdity;

in the magic of language: epithets, obscenities, jokes, prayers (the word is magical, and a strong word drowns out the weakness or weakening of the soul; joking dispels fear);

in the magic of the pose: a pose is a mask or a pretense; a person takes the posture of a cynic because without cynicism—without the protection of a disguise—he will be destroyed by reality;

in the magic of play: play kills time and creates for man a new, interesting world—"there was such contentment on the face of everyone that it seemed as if there wasn't any war and they weren't on a train that was carrying them to positions in great bloody battles and massacres but were, rather, seated behind a game table in some Prague coffee shop";

in the magic of action: desperate, senseless, sudden action, which protects against terror or against death ("a soldier grabs the gate to a pigsty as protection against grenades").

Who is it, really, who plays opposite Švejk? Is there only one such opposing player or are there more?[3] This question is linked to other questions: what kind of structure does Hašek's work have? Only through the revealing of that structure can it be discovered who Švejk is.

The opening sentence of Hašek's work, "And so they've killed our Ferdinand," is not only the beginning of the narration but also announces a contemporaneous event which has started a certain progression. "Something" has been set in motion. This "something" is first called the Archduke Ferdinand; it later acts through the informer Brettschneider, then as the examining judge, and later in the novel as the chaplain Katz and the Lieutenant Dub.[4] This "something" figures as the prison and the military order, as the "procession of bayonets with a man carrying chains walking before it and a wagon carrying a coffin following it," as the idiot-general and the general of latrine inspection, as the slow movement of the train toward the front, ending with "a soiled Austrian cap fluttering on a white cross." This "something" puts people into motion, and people carry out its commands and let themselves be led by it—to death. This "something" is hidden, anonymous, inaccessible, and sometimes appears in the guise of inspecting generals, who interpret for mortals the profound wisdom of the Great Mechanism: "Iron discipline . . . Organization . . . Scharmweise unter Kommando . . . Latrinenscheisen, dan partienweise . . . schlafen gehen."

Švejk without the mechanism is not Švejk, but only cheerful company, a joker, a fox. He becomes Švejk as soon as his true opposing player appears: the Great Mechanism. Whenever this mechanism goes into motion (as is announced in the first sentence, "And so they've killed our Ferdinand"), Hašek appears on the scene. The game begins between man and mechanism, mechanism and man. The mechanism adjusts the man to its own needs, modifies him according to its own logic, and forces him to adopt a certain behavior. The mechanism works as an anonymous force; organizing people into regiments, battalions, and order are as important symbols of the mechanism as chaos and senselessness.

Grotesqueness manifests itself as a mechanical Colossus and a human menagerie; or, to be more exact, the tragicomedy of reality, terror, and ridiculousness, and horror and comedy, are continually revealed by individual representatives of the mechanism, who live either close to or in the masks of the animal world: the police informer Brettschneider was devoured by his own dogs; the chief physician regards all of the patients in the military hospital as "cattle and dung . . . ready for the rope;" a police suspect is investigated by "a gentleman with a cold, official face showing traces of bestial cruelty."

In addition to the movement of the mechanism, of absurdity and senselessness, there is still another movement, that of human destinies and human encounters, human events and adventures, each having its own meaning and sense and together making up the content of human life. People move inside

the Great Mechanism: the mechanical movement that leads people to destruction is in fact made possible and kept going by the mechanized movement of these same people. But some are always falling out of the machine; they get out of its reach, they escape, and they may even exist independently of the mechanism. In this complicated set of gears that fit together and move each other, only single, individual movements (destinies, encounters, events) make any sense, while the movement of the machine as a whole is senseless; the movement of the machine is the movement of absurdity. The discrepancy between the value of human destinies inside the machine and outside it, and the senselessness of the movement of the Great Mechanism as a whole, is so immense and explosive that this vision of the world by no means requires the central figure (Švejk) to develop according to the formula of the critics and an idealized interpretation: to view Švejk as a "positive" figure is to kill him. The two ongoing movements are impeded by a "retarding element," Švejk's narrative, which is always commenting in some way on both movements, and which reveals their relationship or relates them. In a number of places in Hašek's book, grotesqueness appears as an organic part, because it is present in the entire structure of the work.

WHO IS ŠVEJK?

The figure of Švejk must be examined in a world context, but is not to be explained merely by references to the protagonists of Diderot, Cervantes, Rabelais, or Coster.

Švejk is simple and shrewd, a lunatic and an idiot, an imbecile certified by the State and a rebel suspected by it, a malingerer and a calculator, a spy and a loyal subject. If Švejk appears as an idiot at certain times and at other times shrewd, if he acts as a servant at times and at other times as a rebel (while always remaining what he is), his changeability, elusiveness, and "mystery" are consequences of the fact that he is part of a system which is based on the general premise that people pretend that they are what they are not: thus the crook and the controller (the inspector) are central figures in the system by necessity. One of the characteristics of the system is regular and mutual mystification. Švejk moves within a mechanism driven by indifference and sloppiness: people in it who take things seriously and illiterately, reveal the absurdity of the system and at the same time make themselves absurd and laughable. In this system the authorities are convinced that their subjects are swindlers, malingerers, troublemakers, and traitors, while the people recognize behind the officiously solemn masks of their superiors the figures of bumblers and fools. It is a system in which masks, masking, and unmasking function as fundamental relationships among people.

Who is Švejk? Hašek's analysis indicates that people are always being

reduced to something. Švejk, however, is irreducible. Of key importance in this regard is the famous scene in the lunatic asylum, where the doctor turns to Švejk:

> "Take five paces forward and five to the rear." Švejk took ten. "But I told you to take five," said the doctor. "A few paces here or there don't matter to me," replied Švejk.

This is a key to understanding Švejk: people are always being placed in a rationalized and calculated system in which they are processed, disposed of, shoved around, and moved, in which they are reduced to something not human and extrahuman, that is to say to a calculable and disposable thing or quantity. But for Švejk a few paces here or there don't matter. Švejk is not calculable, because he is not predictable. A person cannot be reduced to a thing and is always more than a system of factual relationships in which he moves and by which he is moved.

Does Švejk assume the mask of an idiot, thus hiding the face of an ideal humanity and nobleness of spirit? Does he wear the mask of a loyal soldier in order to conceal his own true face, the face of a revolutionary? Hašek's genius lies in showing man and his own hero as having great breadth, as spanning the extremes of imbecility and shrewdness, of cynicism, magnamity, and sensitivity, of loyalty to the state and rebellion against it.

In Hašek's work people meet in train stations, brothels, taverns, hospitals, and even in the lunatic asylum. And for Švejk, the asylum is in fact the only place in the world where people are free. The problem is, in what sense are they free? Does this mean that in order to be free, you have to go crazy, or that one is mad if one is free? Is the asylum a refuge for freedom, or must freedom be locked up in a madhouse so that it won't hurt people and won't get hurt by them either?

The complexity, the enigmatic quality, and the mysteriousness of Kafka's work are not to be contrasted with qualities of trivial simplicity or intelligibility ascribed to the work of Hašek. In its own way Hašek's work is equally mysterious and full of puzzles, and must also be interpreted by means of modern scholarly analysis. The patriarchal, conservative theory of "popular appeal" fails entirely in this regard.

HAŠEK AND KAFKA

Švejk cannot be identified with Švejkism, just as Kafka cannot be identified as Kafkaesque. What is the Kafkaesque world? It is the world of absurd human thought and absurd behavior and absurd human dreams. It is a world that is a horrible and senseless labyrinth, a world or powerless people caught in the net

of bureaucratic machinery and material gadgets: a world in which man is powerless in a gadget-oriented, alienated reality. Švejkism is one way of reacting in this world of the absurd, of the omnipotence of machines, and of materially motivated relationships. Švejkism and the Kafkaesque are universal phenomena that exist independently of the work of Jaroslav Hašek and Franz Kafka; the two Prague writers merely gave names for these phenomena, and their works gave them a certain form. That does not mean that Hašek's work can be reduced to Švejkism, or that Kafka's work can be reduced to the Kafkaesque. Švejk is not Švejkism, just as Kafka's work is not Kafkaesque. Hašek's Švejk is also an implicit criticism of Švejkism, just as Kafka's work is a criticism of the Kafkaesque. Hašek and Kafka describe and expose the worlds of Švejkism and the Kafkaesque as universal phenomena, and at the same time subject them to criticism.

Kafka's man is walled into a labyrinth of petrified possibilities, alienated relationships, and the materialism of daily life; all of these grow to supernatural and phantasmagoric dimensions, while he constantly and with unrelenting passion searches for the truth. Kafka's man is condemned to live in a world in which the only human dignity is confined to the interpretation of that world; while other forces, beyond the control of any individual, determine the course of the world's development and change. And Hašek, through his own work, shows that man, even when treated as an object, is still man, and that man not only has been turned into an object but has become a producer of objects as well. Man transcends his own status as an object; he is not reducible to an object, and he is more than a system. We do not yet have a suitable description for the miraculous fact that man harbors within himself the enormous and indestructible force of humanity.

In the first half of the twentieth century these two Prague authors offered two visions of the modern world. They described two human types, which at first glance seem far apart and contradictory, but which in reality complement each other. While Kafka depicted the materialism of our day-to-day human world and showed that modern man must live through and become familiar with the basic forms of alienation in order to be human Hašek showed that man transcends materialism, because he is not reducible to an object, or to material products of relationships.

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Chapter 6

ŠVEJK AND BUGULMA OR THE BIRTH OF GREAT HUMOR

Švejk could become a figure in world literature only because he had the experience of Bugulma. The basis of that experience is disillusionment.

1.

Švejk represents an integral part of the poetic image: if it were not for this image he would only be a figure in literature of secondary importance. Any interpretation that ignores the existence of this poetic image, overlooks it due to a misreading of the text, and attempts to answer directly and immediately the question as to who or what Švejk is, will pay for its blindness. This poetic image is found in two texts that Hašek wrote after his return from Russia: in the stories *The Master of the Town of Bugulma*, and in the novel *The Good Soldier Švejk and His Fortunes in the World War*. The stories illustrate the birth of the character Švejk, and provide a key to understanding *The Good Soldier Švejk*.

2.

Švejk was never finished. Death broke the author's pen before he could put everything down on paper that he was thinking. The death belongs to the work itself, and in this death the unfinished manuscript was somehow continued. Hašek was fascinated by the poetic image, lived this image, and subordinated everything to it. He became a faithful writer, who recorded *what this image had to say about itself*, and who thus wrote an account of the encounter of an ordinary person with the world war.

His method of working was very much his own: to write means to drink

oneself to death. In order for the spirit to awaken and begin to tell the stories it must be fortified with a stimulating drink. The spirit becomes inspired by the elixir of life in order to freely create fables, but the body grows feeble under the influence of this miraculous liquid. The spirit forces the body to gradually drink itself to death in order to provide the spirit the ability to concentrate in its race with time. Later, of course, everything—spirit and body both—faces the abyss, but it does so with a victorious gesture. This gesture takes the form of the work that is created and which *endures*—the social product of the spirit, of the drunk's imagination, and of the body weakened by drinking beer. The work itself endures.

3.

Švejk is a remarkable fragment: everything that was essential was said in it, and any continuation would have been superfluous. Does this mean that Hašek died at just the right time?

4.

In Švejk's homeland people drink a lot, but only barbarians *consume alcohol.* The experienced nose can easily tell from Švejk's breath what bewitching drinks he and his lance-corporal guard tried out on their way to České Budějovice: "rum, a Polish vodka, and various kinds of schnaps made out of rowan berries, walnuts, cherries, vanilla, etc."

5.

Švejk upsets that which is superior and of higher standing. What is this standard to which these things no longer conform? Is Švejk not an omnipresent mirror in which it is possible to see how people have lost all sese of moderation? Is it not possible to see there how their immoderation is reinforced when they allow themselves to be reduced and lowered to mere social roles and masks with which they hide or disfigure their faces?

6.

Švejk is never in a hurry, and always has more than enough time. He is not a child of his time, and goes against the current. He goes against the current on foot, and thus he walks very slowly. He tends to confirm the penetrating observation of Ladislav Klíma the haste of the modern age represents "the height of absurdity and baseness."

7.

The beginning and the end of the narration feature legs and arms. The story begins with a historical fact. The Archduke Ferdinand has been shot in Sarajevo, and the news of the assassination reaches Švejk while he is massaging his knees, which are afflicted with rheumatism. The twentieth century has begun. The story ends when in *Bugulma* Švejk shakes hands with the members of the Revolutionary Tribunal before which he is to answer for counterrevolutionary activity.

8.

In Švejk's time people still knew what it was to suffer from hunger and thirst. Because of this one's humanity was displayed in a simple gesture, when one gave a fellow human a piece of bread or a swig of water, or even a gold coin with which the person could "buy some brandy for the road."

9.

The most severe verdict on Hašek was delivered by Jaroslav Durych: Švejk constitutes a permanent monument to the lack of inspiration and contemptibility. In this character are concentrated all vulgarity and baseness of the nation. "Švejk is Sancho Panza without Don Quixote." In reality—to stay with this terminology—the entire originality of Hašek's imagination is found in the fact that Švejk represents both of them, that Don Quixote comes into being out of Sancho Panza. In the guise of Bugulma's master Švejk defends those who have been wronged or persecuted. In one phase of his fortunes Švejk is transformed into the Don Quixote of the revolution, and for this reason sooner or later he must be exposed as a counterrevolutionary.

10.

Transformations. The first transformation: what will happen if oppression, injustice, and offense come to power? Will justice reign on Earth through them? And will the miracle that Comenius believed in come to pass—will the stutterer become an orator, the lame run, the blind see and lead others? Bugulma's experience is quite different, alarming: those who were oppressed yesterday become oppressors in turn, and the persecuted themselves begin to persecute. Reality is reinforced by the grotesque: the stutterers do not stop stuttering, but they have power in their hands now, and so force the society to loudly and ostentatiously celebrated their eloquence.

11.

The second transformation: Švejk throws away the uniform of the Austrian imperial army and voluntarily joins the revolutionary forces. After being an army orderly he becomes commander. Will he put on airs?

12.

Whenever the people attempt to take seriously the *words* that say that the people and only the people are the source of all power, then "normalizers" appear who drive these crazy ideas from people's heads.[1] They do this either with force and terror or by performing diversionary shows. They perform their own play in their own theater with the people, the sovereign ruler.

13.

In the Spring of the memorable year of 1921 the tales about Bugulma came into the world, and in the Fall the first part of the novel followed. It was at this same time that Lenin and Trotsky were sending armed detachments to crush the sailors' revolt at Kronstadt. The bureaucratic dictatorship that was entrenching itself using police methods could not tolerate the rule of workers' councils beside it or over against it—that is, it could not tolerate a democracy of workers. A year later Rosa Luxemburg's notes on the Russian revolution—written in a German prison—were published posthumously: "Freiheit nur für Anhänger der Regierung, nur für die Mitglieder einer Partei ist keine Freiheit. Freiheit ist immer Freiheit der anders Denkenden." [Freedom only for supporters of the government, only for members of a political party, is no freedom at all. Freedom is always freedom for those who think differently].[2] Rosa Luxemburg's *Russian Revolution* and Jaroslav Hašek's *Bugulma* belong together: they both grow out of the social spirit of democracy, the critical spirit, and freedom.

14.

Three devoted adherents of the Revolution: the philosopher György Lukács, the raconteur Jaroslav Hašek, and the politician Rosa Luxemburg. In 1923 the most accomplished of them published his noteworthy reflections on the reification of the modern age, but he overlooked the fact that the revolution itself had already completely undergone reification. Luxemburg and Hašek looked deeper into modernity than did the famous philosopher.

15.

Amidst all of the shocks and defeats humor watches over people like a guardian angel and guards them against falling into despair or cynicism and indifference.

16.

Irony and a godless age. That which God created has for the romantic person of irony sunk to being merely the material for His wittiness, resourcefulness, and playfulness. The world is a stage on which HE is featured as the center of attention and events. The world exists only so that the romantic can play with it as if it were his toy. God is also a mere servant of the romantic person of irony, in whom modern subjectivity reaches its height—in the blindness of limited and expansive egotism.

17.

Hašek disavowed romantic irony with all of his writings. His irony is both deeper and higher. The writer consequently did not play with reality like an imaginary god, as if it were the material of his own brilliance. He only dutifully records the events of his time. He performs the service of a writer who faithfully writes down what is dictated to him by events which themselves are ironic. The height of irony is in the events. Because of this the honest writer gains the maximum amount of freedom when he liberates himself and reality from the captivity of subjectivity.

18.

It is as if the author was afraid that the meaning of his work would not be understood, so he clearly and distinctly emphasized the meaning in the title. The most readable of the books is called "The Fortunes of the Good Soldier Švejk During the World War," but interpreters—i.e., so-called experts—read the novel as if the title was "The Adventures of the Soldier Švejk in the War."

19.

Because of this we, the nonprofessionals, must reread Švejk again differently in order to ferret out the meaning of the work.

20.

The "fortunes" are not the same thing as "the adventures." The Czech word used here, *osud*, is normally used only in the singular, as the plural form designates something exceptional. Why did Hašek stress the unusual expression (*osudy*), rather than the more usual term, "adventures" (*příběhy*)? Or: what constitutes the "fatefulness" of Švejk's adventures?

Švejk is a pilgrim of the modern age, that is, of a world without God. Comenius's Christian pilgrim wanders through the world and is aware of things, but he himself remains hidden. He notes the perversity of conditions, but does not interfere with them, until he suddenly encounters a miraculous conversion and concentrates on God as the only certainty and hope. What then constitutes the fatefulness of Švejk's encounters? Švejk—his are encounters that never repeat themselves, always new and astonishing. In contrast to the man of Descartes, who doubts until one day and once and for all he finds a method with whose help he masters reality—and in contrast to Comenius's pilgrim, who wanders lost in order to see God and rest one day and for all eternity—in all of his encounters and adventures Švejk never experiences a fateful transformation, one that would radically change the meaning and direction of his life. None of his adventures is devalued to a transit point on the way to somewhere else higher up. They are all equally full and filled with the present. In none of these encounters, however, does there appear any example of friendship, love, or relationship to God. It is here that the "fatefulness" of these encounters is to be found.

21.

And yet an event took place which promised a complete change, and no sacrifice for this cause was in vain or even elevated enough: revolution. The "Tales from Bugulma" are a sign of disenchantment and a parting of the ways: the revolution had degenerated into a new form of oppression and degradation.

22.

In *Bugulma* two masters are fighting for control over the town: Švejk (in the guise of Comrade Gašek) and Yerohymov. Two people—two different worlds, two irreconcilable principles, i.e., starting points. Yerohymov personifies the obsession with force. For Švejk revolution means human liberation and a sense of humor. In a country which is racked by acts of violence on both sides, by both white and red terror, Švejk's character can only end up as complete "Don Quixotism."

23.

Who will win in the dispute over power in Bugulma? Švejk or Yerohymov? Neither of them will win. Behind both of these characters and above them the true victor is emerging, one who is coming to power by force and will displace both of the rival masters as short-lived puppets and a momentary provisional solution. Hašek characterizes this future and true ruler as follows: "From his whole appearance (Agapov's) one could see that everything which had preceded the fall of the Czar's rule had made him into a cruel person, ruthless, hard and terrible, . . . who struggles with the shades of the past everywhere he goes, who spreads his suspicions all around and continually thinks about some unknown traitor."

24.

The Baroness von Botzenheim called Švejk "der brave Soldat" [the good soldier]. By this she meant that he would fight "valiantly, heroically and courageously" for the Emperor, and that he would gladly lay down his life for the glory of the monarchy. The soldier Švejk is not "good" [brav] in the way that the noblewoman had in mind. He is a *good* soldier, which means that he never fires at anyone (with one exception, when he destroys a bottle of vodka with a round from his pistol in order to save Yerohymov from a "green snake"). As a soldier in both the Imperial and revolutionary armies he is always really a civilian. He is a good soldier because he never crosses the bounds prescribed for behavior in civilian life by propriety.

25.

Who is Švejk? Inasmuch as we do not want to get involved in sterile arguments—whether he is clever or stupid, whether he puts on a mask, and if so what kind—we must keep to one elementary characteristic: Švejk is temporarily a soldier, but his civilian occupation is trading in dogs (not a shop). He lives from day to day, lives in a rented space, does not have any family, and moves around on the edges of society. His "trade," however, requires perception and a knowledge of conditions.

26.

At the turn of the century demand was increasing in the cities for purebred dogs. The prospering and well-off social groups rejected the ridiculous ambition of their predecessors to buy titles of nobility for themselves and their families. For them it was enough to have noble dogs. Švejk was simply meeting those needs when he made purebreds out of ordinary dogs with no lineage

whatsoever—that is, falsifying their lineage. First Lieutenant Lukáš is not a dog lover, but he defers to the tastes of notables. He adheres to the good custom of well-situated people to strut along the promenade with their purebred dogs. The animal represents a mark of their social standing. The ladies promenade with the dogs, or they go on horseback or in coaches, while the ongoing care of these noble animals is provided by the servants.

Of course, change is in sight. The horse and dog continue to be a sign of social prestige, but a new symbol is inexorably moving in to take their place, a symbol by means of which people publicly display their status: the automobile. At the beginning of the war an old shepherd says prophetically: "The old prince Schwarzenberg, that one only rode in such a coach, and the snotty young prince smells only of the automobile. That one, the Lord is going to smear the gasoline in his face."

27.

The divine comedian exalts finitude and the ridiculousness that springs from that into the true essence of man. He acts and behaves according to his nature when he takes finitude on his shoulders and concentrates it in his person in such a way as to render himself ridiculous. Because he knows how to laugh at his own finitude (fallibility, conditionality), he can reveal human greatness in this ridiculousness. He conducts an experiment on himself. He concentrates within himself all of the ridiculousness that is found in finitude, and in this way he liberates people from the captivity of the painful and narrow finitude that takes itself too seriously and adores its own importance and indispensability. Švejk belongs to this line of divine comedians.

28.

The modern-day Don Quixote cannot be naive. He has gone through many experiences in life, is worldly wise, familiar with the things of the world, but the main element of his existence consists of a sense of humor that affords him a safe defense against disaster. He knows the bitterness of defeat and humiliation, but never becomes bitter. He has felt the bitter taste of desolation and rejection, but is not embittered. He knows about human malice but is not malicious. Greed of any kind—for riches, power, fame, sensation, revenge—is foreign to him. For this reason he can reflect on anything, anytime, and can enter into conversation with anyone.

29.

The post heroic age manufactures heroes on the assembly line. Journalism and literature have been transformed into a profitable trade that prepares

models and patterns that the masses look up to with servile admiration and imitate: idols of youth, idols of young girls, idols of aging women, idols of successful men. Švejk has to be an antihero as a protest against these manufactured items. He is not an artificial creation, but rather springs naturally from the environment of a large city. Hašek, at the end of his tale of the adventures of his antihero, says of the creation of his poetic imagination in an absolutely matter-of-fact way that: "he has come home from the war, and you can encounter him as a shabby man in the Prague streets."

30.

If one would like to know what Hašek meant by "world war" he must take into consideration the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, Masaryk, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and others. For each of them the war was connected to revolution, but for each of them in a different way. For Hašek "world war" meant the connection between ordinary war and civil war. The "World War" ended in the collapse of Austria, the debacle of Germany, but also in the *overthrow* of the revolution. The tales from Bugulma represent the poetic record of that overthrow.

31.

Švejk's fortunes take place during the World War, a war which does not represent a temporary and accidental derailment, an oversight or a mistake. In the course of this war and in its horrors the essence of the modern age is concentrated and expressed. How can and should an ordinary man live in such an age? This is the basic theme of Hašek's tales. Should he close up into himself and enjoy life? Survive? Exploit and use others for one's own gain? Švejk remains Švejk—during the war and afterwards: he does not get rich, he does not accumulate a fortune, he does not make a career for himself, he is not advancing rapidly into a responsible function.

32.

Which side is Švejk on in the "world war?" Does he belong to the side of the victors or the losers? Or, does the essence of the "world war" lie in the fact that there are no winners, that on both or on all sides there are only losers, and that Švejk, a man of the people, grasped this truth?

33.

Death on the battlefield is not beautiful or uplifting. It repels with its naturalism: intestines fallen out, dried blood, and also the stench of decomposing bodies. Seen up close death in war does not bear embellishment. "The enemy plane dropped a bomb straight into the field altar, and nothing was left of the field chaplain except some bloody rags."

34.

When a person cannot identify with either of the warring sides because he sees limitations in both, he then becomes a target for attacks from all sides. With this approach he opens up a space that is free of any ideological baggage, and in this space a *universal* liberating humor is born.

35.

The *Fortunes* [of the Good Soldier Švejk] do not recognize the ideology of the "average man" (der Durchschnittsmensch). A person does not consist of the average. The ordinary man is gifted with unconventionality. It is not some amorphous, undifferentiated, pliable "people," but the inexhaustible qualities of real people (in the plural!). For every ordinary person there is a unique quality.

36.

In the *Fortunes* the commonplace is not celebrated. Everydayness is not the same thing as the commonplace. In a letter from the tenth of December 1513, Machiavelli describes his day: in the morning squabbles with the woodcutter and with shopkeepers, at midday sitting in the inn, playing cards and dice. "We sometimes argue, and our yelling can be heard all the way to San Casciano." And in the evening, studying his favorite Greek and Roman authors: ". . . I throw off my ordinary raiment (veste quotidiana), muddy and dirty, and I clothe myself with royal and courtly garb (panni reali e curiali)." This everydayness represents an unaffected and natural transition from the commonplace to the festive, and the joining of the two. On the other hand, Švejk knows neither the commonplace nor the festive. Every day of his life is equal to adventurousness, nothing is repeated, and all days fill up with unexpected and astonishing adventures. Ill humor and boredom are unknown quantities for his everyday life.

37.

In every human encounter there is something to celebrate, so therefore holidays and festivities can never ossify to fixed official institutions that are raised up above the commonplace as if they were self-contained forces.

38.

Hašek's work is not so superficial and prosaic that it could serve as an anticlerical or antiwar tract. It is rather a pioneering critique of the modern age as an alliance of the church and science (medicine, psychiatry), plus journalism, plus bureaucracy, plus the army, plus the judicial system and the police, plus faddish opinions,

39.

People live in their thinking, are shut up in it, and through this prism they perceive and judge reality. They persist in the obstinacy of their opinions, and it would sometimes appear that there is no force that could shake their obduracy. But is it at all possible to *talk someone out* of their opinion? What arguments should Švejk use to convince the Baroness that he is not "ein braver Soldat" [a good soldier]? How should he convince the Putim sergeant Flanderka that he is not a Russian spy? The shepherd and vagabond that he is not a deserter? The doctor and psychiatrist that he is not a malingerer? Agapov that he is not a counterrevolutionary element? Are all of these people capable of breaking out of the prison of their obstinate opinions? The storyteller does not give any information about this, and leaves them all to their fate—i.e., exposes them to ridicule.

40.

Among the basic metaphysical needs of humans are the need to eat and to drink, as well as to *talk*. People talk about the most weighty matters, and as long as they are concentrating on these things then food and drink accompany them like a faithful shadow. As soon as dialogue degenerates to mere conversation or babbling, food and drink are elevated to the level of the main concern. When a person is not able to listen to another person, but is fixated on himself and his own ego—which has become a curse for him—then food and drink are transformed into an obsession, and humanity changes into a caricature and a monstrosity. Father Lacina and the soldier Baloun are both concerned only with their own person, which is equated with gluttony and the digestive tract.

41.

What is the insatiable hunger of Baloun compared to the bottomless abyss of the war, an abyss whose unrelieved voracity things and people fall victim to in great numbers and without interruption?

42.

In war, in prison, in the hospital, in a mental asylum—in all of these places a person does not need to worry about getting things because all of his needs are looked after. The institution looks after food, drink, clothing, and a place to live. On the other hand, a person hosts another person, and in the process shows him kindness. At the station in České Budějovice Švejk is hospitable to a wounded Hungarian soldier by giving him some beer. He does not understand the soldier's language, but he listens to him just the same. It is in this hospitality, speaking and listening, that two strangers meet as humans.

43.

Does a tasteful and reveling approach to food reveal the poetry and beauty of all reality? Or, will the untamed passion to speak, remember, tell a story, argue, engage in polemics, tease—the things from which trust and understanding are spun and forged—win out over this predilection? Švejk, the wanderer and the shepherd "sat by the stove where 'potatoes in a blanket' were cooking," and talked about old times, about wars, about the "gendarme's law," and about the emperor. In a word, they talked politics.

44.

As long as politics is not understood as a derivative of "politicking" and "police," then Švejk appears to be the most political character in Czech literature. His mistrust of any masters—old and new—creates a solid basis for genuine politics.

45.

When Hašek was naming his novel—the novel that is so transparent, so obvious, so understandable, that no one, including the experts, thought to query it—he encoded there the secret of Švejk. Every word of the title is ambiguous and ironic. There is an irony in Socrates and there is also a romantic irony, but the "World War" gave birth to yet another kind of irony:

the irony of history, the irony of events, the irony of things. Events themselves bring together and drag down into one space and maelstrom things so dissimilar and mutually exclusive as victory and defeat, the comic and the tragic, the elevated and the lowly. Did anyone notice that in the same year that Hašek's *Fortunes of the Good Soldier Švejk* came out, an article about the war by Hugo von Hofmannsthal was published, symptomatically entitled "Die Ironie der Dinge" ["The Irony of the Thing"]? Who among the interpreters of Hašek's writings would have been interested, however, in what was happening so close at hand? And who would have been so bold as to say that in Hašek's ingenious novel the great humor ("den store Humor") of the modern age was born?

(1969)

Translated by James Satterwhite

Chapter 7

THE IRREPLACEABLE NATURE OF POPULAR CULTURE

In discussions about culture we share, in fact, the illusions of the reformers, but we lack the breadth and depth of their understanding. Because of that, the wave of a hand over "reform" as an excessive chapter is premature. Even today we live in its naivete and illusions, and we live in them as well when, intentionally or out of ignorance, we break the ties with the nineteenth century. Reform-mindedness is, above all, the illusion regarding the omnipotence of culture. Cultural utopianism consoles itself with the presumption that culture can influence and resolve all, although sober experience says that culture can resolve precious little and influence few people. Far more noticeable is the impotence of culture, owing to the fact that it has never succeeded in humanizing power, enlightening rulers, or getting to the heart of everyday practical human relations, so that man might live "poetically" on earth. Is either that "little bit" that culture resolves or that "even less" which it influences so significant that its meaning cannot be subjected to quantitative indicators, while that "little bit" and "even less" can be everything for man?

Culture is irretrievable and irreplaceable. However, if nothing can take its place, can it, then, itself replace something and appear in a representative function? Reformers were obliged to place upon culture the burden of representation: the fundamental questions of human existence—questions which are "normally" divided into separate spheres of social life: politics, public life, personal endeavor—culture assumed them because it was the only element that in the nineteenth century knew how to be at the height of the occasion. Fortunate are those peoples, of course, who have experienced in their history moments of harmony in which great policy contributed to great culture, and the exaltation of that which is social contributed to truth in personal life. Owing to the fact that in a time of reform this harmony does not exist, culture in a certain man-

ner compensates for the designation of aforementioned realms and thereby masks their frailty and inferiority.

We fail to keep up with the reformers who thought about culture in relation to the meaning of popular existence. For us, the "Czech Question" no longer exists. Separating the consideration of culture from that of the "philosophy of Czech history," we rejected the most elementary justification of culture and its privileged role—national life. And, however contradictory the standpoint of the "great discussion" may have otherwise been, with regard to one point there was no discrepancy on the part of Palacký and Frič, Nejedlý and Masaryk, Konrad and Pekář.[1] They all respected the basic fact that can be expressed in modern terminology as the principle that a people that does not reflect on how to produce and have atom bombs or how to compete for world primacy in oil production, must justify its existence and meaning in the manner that corresponds to its reality. František Červinka not long ago referred to the electrifying statement of H. G. Sauer at the close of the century and his provocative question: "Does our national existence have any significance at all?" Indeed, what are we, and what can we become? Do we exist in Central Europe as a diligent, obedient, and hardworking people, or do we dare aspire to something more? Who will then define the limits and justify the content of our courage if discussion on the Czech question already belongs to the past?

(1967)

Translated by Julianne Clarke

Chapter 8

CULTURE AGAINST NIHILISM

Culture is based on works, lives in works, and survives in them. On the other hand, nihilism as a way of life that is based on nothingness and devastation is a contradiction of culture. The substance of nihilism consists of "beastly contempt for all which is august and truthful." Nihilism ruins people, breaks their backbone, corrupts their ethics, and devalues thought. Most of all, however, it degrades, empties, and makes futile all criticism as sheer negation and all critics as having only three instruments at their disposal: an axe, incense, and ashes. Let us not forget, however, that this image is inappropriate for real critics such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, Voltaire, Rousseau, Heine, Marx or Mácha, and Havlíček in nineteenth-century Czech society.

The futile nature of nihilism is clearly illustrated in Mácha's case. Nihilistic criticism condemned his poem "May" as negation and nihilism; *at the same time* it demanded "great works." This nihilistic criticism failed to grasp that "May" is a masterpiece, and its "condemnation" represents cultural and intellectual nihilism *par excellence*.

Real criticism is always positive since it itself is a work of art, and can only exist as imagination, thought, and form. Nihilistic criticism knows only overblown words and the practical weight of denotation.

Our socialist culture of the last eight years, distinguished by the works of Novomeský, Kundera, Sommer, Vyskočil, Tatarka, and others, appears to me to be a historically prominent criticism of nihilism, or, as real culture which returns concreteness to a man, meaning to words, humanity to sadness, and progressiveness to laughter, fantasy, and joy.[1] Against this positiveness of socialist culture nihilism can only provide empty words and awkward gestures.

(1964)

Translated by Zdenka Brodska and Mary Hrabik Samal

Chapter 9

THREE OBSERVATIONS ON MACHIAVELLI

I

Machiavelli is a demystifier, but the question is whether we ourselves are not subject to mystification when we interpret his work. Machiavelli has been read and interpreted in the most diverse fashions and has been considered the precursor of everything possible: of nationalism, fascism, direct democracy, pluralistic democracy, totalitarianism, etc. First of all, we must ask ourselves whether these very terms do not deform and mystify if we apply them beyond the limits of their origin and validity. Let us say, I consider that the conceptualization according to which Machiavelli is said to have anticipated empirical democracy is expression of false consciousness that fails to elucidate sufficiently the methodology for itself and, thereby, blocks the path toward an understanding of the past.

The point of departure and ultimate goal as well of interpreting Machiavelli are those fundamental concepts of his work as, for example, virtu, fortuna, necessita, occasione, in which his thought is concentrated. Every examination of Machiavelli must, therefore, start with these concepts in order to clarify for itself their content and significance and effect their critique by means of temporal-historical, sociological, and philosophical analysis. Only after that, when we are clear about the basic structure of the work, can we progress toward separate secondary issues or carry out a historical comparison.

If we start with the internal relationship between virtu and fortuna we will scarcely be able to defend the interpretation by which Machiavelli construes politics as (merely) a human invention. Such an interpretation is probably motivated by the worthy aspiration to exalt in historical thought and theory all that emphasizes activism, consciousness, goals, and the like, but such an aspiration is itself trapped in temporal circumstances" and therefore transmits to other epochs its own one-sidedness. According to Machiavelli, politics includes both free creativity and voluntary activism as well as given circumstances, reverses of fortune, and shifts of fate; so that it is far sooner a game in

the broad sense of the word; a conflictual event between one set of players and other, opposing players, than it is free human creativity. Politics as a game is not a chess match in which the rules are given in advance, within which framework one strategy conflicts with another, but rather a type of event whose course provides a delineation of the rules of the game that unify activity and circumstances, endeavor and fate, awareness of the goal, and luck.

In *Dialectics of the Concrete* I connected Machiavelli and Bacon, because both of them effected desanctification of reality. One brought about the secularization of nature and thereby established the precepts for the origin of modern science and technology, while the other established the "secularization" of man and the demystification of rulers, and these initiatives made possible the origin and emergence of modern politics. But to demonstrate the greatness of a particular thinker means at the same time to pose the question, what part of his work is enduring and what part is or my be transitory. The revolutionary aspect of Machiavelli's conceptualization of politics is therefore at the same time a challenge: is or is not a new and different conceptualization of politics possible, one based on a new understanding of man and the world, of history and nature?

II

Quite often something that existed long before and independently of Machiavelli is associated with his name: deceit, treachery, betrayal, and murder.

Whoever takes part in politics must be aware of where he is going and wherein he operates. He enters a realm in which he can be deceived, violated, lied to, coopted, and the like, but as a politician he must reckon with all that. Politics is a game in which murder, entrapment, trickery, and betrayal appear as the opposing players with whom one must function efficiently and successfully. One can go into politics with ethical standards that lie to me that I dare not be a criminal, an enemy occupier, or a traitor, but I am on a political level only if I reckon with such phenomena and if I know how to fight against them. Customarily the relation between politics and morality is construed in such a manner that he who is moral in politics is thought to be necessarily at the same time naive, undiscerning, trusting, etc. But if we construe the relation between ethics and politics as being that ethos is possible only on the basis of a polis, morality in politics emerges and reasserts itself in fact as farsightedness, discernment, capacity for criticism, vision, etc. Masaryk's well-known statement that Machiavellism does not suit small nations meant only that small nations cannot be sufficiently shrewd. He who is shrewd must no longer be a sage. In the same manner, stupidity and gullibility do not signify wisdom. In other words, in the traditional understanding morality in politics is seen as weakness or as an indication of the same. But morality in politics should above all mean

the ascendance of discernment, farsightedness, wisdom, and a critical spirit.

A politician must be capable of seeing and identifying and dares not be the captive of ideological illusion. To be the captive of ideological illusion means not to see through and to operate within a framework of deception and self—deception. The army is massed on the borders of the country, but the ruler is to such a degree fettered and blinded by ideological illusion that in that concentration of forces he does not see the threat to the sovereignty of the nation, and, therefore, he cannot act in a suitable fashion. Only the politician who eliminates the damage of mystification, that is, who sees through the intention and ideology of the opposing players, can be at the highest level of his time.

III

Havlíček[1] was the first among us who evinced a concern with Machiavelli. That fact is not a coincidence. Actual modern Czech politics begins with Havlíček and Palacký. And Havlíček—as is known—effects demystification, and observes reality without sentimentality. He is not only the author of the well-known statement that we must create "honest politics"—a statement that could be the manifestation of moralism, which, for its time, already penetratingly analyzes real social forces and asks itself on whom, and on what social sectors, should politics lean in order to be honest.

A second comment: the "Czech Question" as the issue of a political people in Central Europe encompasses a complex of relations among politics, culture, public life, education, etc., in addition to which the most prominent characteristic of this totality of national life is the fact that politics here constitutes the weakest link.

Up to now, indeed, the characteristic antagonism between a developed culture and an undeveloped politics, between cultural development and political backwardness is unresolved—so that politics is not at the highest level of its time and is incapable of that act which would straighten the backbone of the nation.

(1969)

Translated by Julianne Clarke

Chapter 10

ILLUSIONS AND REALISM

This statement could never have arisen in Czechoslovakia: "In order to reach a certain goal in politics, an alliance with the devil himself is permissible—but you must be sure that it's you tricking him, and not he you." Contemporary Czech politics from its very beginnings is characterized by a childlike trust and is subject to treacherous illusions, even when it thinks it is being realistic and when it attempts to be coldly calculating. And the founders of the modern Czech program go so far in this self-deception as to identify political illusion with realism and sobriety. Realism was already, in our case, a cloak of naivete and a lack of cunning in the nineteenth century. Havlíček bases the Austro-slavic conception[1] on three assumptions: "First, that we Slavs will be eternally democratic and free; secondly, we will be eternally bound by the dynasty; and thirdly, that the dynasty stands firmly beside democracy and freedom." This third assumption represents the hereditary sin of Czech politics: when and where was any dynasty ever freethinking and democratic? How is it at all possible to presuppose that a reactionary force is going to be progressive? The permanent poverty and crisis of the Czech politics of the nineteenth century originated from the useless attempt to resolve the unresolvable and from the expectation of a miracle that would transform the reactionary into the progressive. That kind of illusionism trapped Czech politics in a vicious circle. It derived from the presumption that Czechs should be democratic and freethinking, but the conclusion was worded so that they could not actually be too democratic and freethinking, because they would have brought down upon themselves their only powerful and influential ally: the dynasty. Verbally, the principle is defended that the Czechs should manage their own politics, but practice is governed by the rule that they cannot behave differently than in accord with the interests of the dynasty.

The ambiguity that becomes the source of hesitation and pragmatism stands at the very foundation of Czech politics. The founders correctly attest

that they are in the trend toward worldwide centralization and between two giants, conquering Germany and Czarist Russia. The Czechs cannot hold out as a free political nation without influential and powerful allies. From this affirmation, however, was drawn a false conclusion: the ally should be sought in the Hapsburg monarchy. The founders bestowed on Czech politics a justifiable basis, while at the same time they burdened it for an entire decade with an ideological illusion that is unable to differentiate true allies from false. Ideological illusion is the reason that Czech politics is losing its battle with time. Instead of foreseeing situations, discerning in time the intentions of its opponents, and organizing forces for its own game, it lets events take it by surprise and it falls into a trap. Thus reason is always introduced to politics *post festum*, just when events are over. It is not, therefore, the essential feature and formulator of politics, but rather emerges as a tardy commentator on events concluded, as a subsequentadded consideration that should have been elaborated sooner. Ideological illusion is contrary to a sober view of reality. To see reality as it is means, essentially, to shatter the myths and illusions that compel us to observe ourselves, things, and situations through someone else's eyes.

Politics as a play for power and a game from a position of power is always also a struggle in which everyone tries to impose his view of reality and interpretation of events on someone else. The remarkable dialectics of the master and the slave occurs in this sphere, so that the victor not only compels the vanquished not only to view himself and the world in a certain way, but he also prescribes the formulas by which this capitulation and betrayal of himself must be carried out. More precisely, in this game the vanquished becomes he who permits an alien viewpoint to be forced upon him, he who evaluates his opponent. This moment was underestimated in the traditional interpretation of the "Czech Question"; for that reason one foresees that a substantive difference exists between whether the Czech question is construed as the problem of a small nation that lives between East and West or as the problem of a political people in Central Europe. In the first instance, we want to know how, as a small nation, we can survive; in the second instance, we wonder what kind of link exists between Central Europe and a political people. Central Europe is not a geographical concept, but rather a historical reality. We are a political nation only insofar as we share the customs of Central Europe. Central Europe exists only insofar as a nation endures as an historical subject that not only knows how to withstand the strain of currents and influences but also how to transform them into an independent political, cultural, and spiritual synthesis. The nation that does not withstand this strain and conflict ceases to be a historical subject and becomes the mere object of pressures and forces; it disintegrates at the same time as a political nation, and is transformed into a population that speaks Czech. In this metamorphosis, when the political nation is turned into producers of steel or wheat that speak Czech or Slovak,

Central Europe also dies as an historical reality and becomes a mere strategic space or colonial territory. And, along with that, a sovereign country becomes a province.

The Czech Question represents the dispute regarding the significance of the existence of a political nation in Central Europe. The nation exists, restores, and reaffirms itself in this controversy in which the exalted is separated from the lowly, that which dignifies from that which humiliates. In this dispute the nation endures in constant danger that it will fall, through its own blame, or be cast into a more abominable, subordinate, and debased position. The Czech question is, then, the historical struggle to see whether or not a political nation will be relegated to a mere population, whether or not a country will break down into a province, whether or not democracy will succumb in the face of fascism, and humanism in the face of barbarism. In the Czech question is simultaneously resolved the controversy as to whether a political nation in Central Europe can exist as a progressive and independent people. We have become accustomed to speaking of the Czech Question as a universal issue, but that habit obviously deprives us of the courage to look at today's world. Palacký explained the Czech Question against a backdrop of world events that are aiming toward the centralization of humanity and make difficult the existence of small states in Europe. What is the nature of the connection between the Czech Question and world events today?

Was not our crisis part of the European and world crisis and is it not so today? Did not our crisis become a privileged moment in which the bases of the European crisis were revealed? Modern politics is characterized as manipulation of the masses. This manipulation is implemented in a climate of fear and hysteria. Political manipulation, as a manifestation of technical rationality in relations among people, is based on an artificially cultivated atmosphere of irrationality: the technique of manipulation constitutes and requires permanent hysteria, fear, and hope. Politics is, as mass manipulation, possible only within a system of universalized manipulation. In order that politics might become mass manipulation, that people might be transformed into a mass that can be governed, it is necessary first of all to carry out an epic change that reduces the world to diffusion, nature to a source of raw material and energy, truth to accuracy, man to a subject connected to a corresponding object. Only on the basis of epic transformation can the system of generalized manipulation prevail, a system in which it is possible to behave toward people and nature, the living and the dead, thoughts and feelings, as if they were objects to be manipulated.

In Palacký's time the nation was threatened by world centralization. In our time the people are threatened by a system of universalized manipulation, a component of which is the ascendancy of false consciousness in social life, and a corresponding decline in the individual capacity for and interest in differentiating good from evil, truth from untruth. In a system of generalized

manipulation truth is pervaded by lies, good by evil; this inseparability, indifference, and stupor create the prevailing climate of everyday life. In a system of universal manipulation, therefore, the danger increases that a political nation will be turned into an apathetic mass, a throng of inhabitants that lose their capability for and interest in differentiating in their own conduct, thought, and lives, truth from lies, good from evil, the lofty from the base.

The Czech Question is, in our times, a world question only insofar as we grasp that our current crisis can be resolved only as a world crisis, i.e., by transcending those bases from which the crisis emerged. The Czech Question today is a world issue only to the degree that we know that to overcome our crisis means at the same time to do away with the system of generalized manipulation. The liberating and revolutionary alternative opposed to the system of universal manipulation in all its forms, degenerations, and manifestations originates from a quite different conceptualization of man and history, of nature and time, of being and truth; this requires a new concept of politics. Therefore, to the Czech Question belong the search for and elaboration of new bases of politics, substantially different from political manipulation. The previous ruling sectors and classes advanced at the level of basic political values, certain characteristics and features of their own distorted existence, so that it appears that they are the grounds for political cunning and deceit, brutality and stupor, tyranny and arrogance. However, are these traditional reaffirming traits of politics capable of being joined with the mission of the working class and the working sectors of the modern world? Can the working class adopt them and, through their mediation, implement its own politics, or is not and should not the working class be developing new political qualities? Is not and will not its basic and revolutionary contribution be that it will introduce and implement in politics a differentiation between wisdom and cunning, discernment and brutality, courage and arrogance, but also between caution and childish faith, careful analysis and illusionism, between genuine and false realism?

In that sense we must say that the Czech Question will be on the highest level of the age and will indeed become a world issue when it overcomes the combination of ideological illusion in politics and with it also the ambiguity and weakness of the marvelous beginning of the founders, Palacký and Havlíček. Czech politics will free itself of these defects, as soon as it reflects more profoundly on the meaning of Marx's statement: "In order to reach a certain goal in politics, an alliance with the devil himself is permissible—but you have to be sure that it's you tricking him, and not he you."

(1969)

Translated by Julianne Clarke

Chapter 11

THE WEIGHT OF WORDS

To this day a writer in our country possesses such authority that his words are not taken lightly. This authority derives from the assumption that a writer is a specialist in his field, that is, in the realm of words, and particularly that he knows what words mean. The words of a writer are not taken lightly because the writer is acquainted with the weight of words. And whenever language is threatened with the danger of becoming an integral part of a mystification that covers up the difference between truth and untruth, the lofty and the base, good and evil and attempts to transform reality into a fragmented and indefinite substance, handed over to manipulators, then the defense of language is equivalent to an act of liberation. To re—endow words with their real meaning and to take up each word as a word, that is, to disclose its significance, was and remains the mission of a writer. A writer cannot avoid that requirement even when conversing with another writer, i.e., in a polemic. A polemic between writers should be precisely an argument that discloses, in which the hidden comes to the surface, the obscure is clarified, and things are presented as they truly are. A polemic can be that type of argument if one does not underestimate the weight of words.

It seems to me that the frivolous use of words by Václav Havel in his polemical article "The Czech Fate" (Český osud) deprived the polemic of an objective sense and degraded it to a personal proposition.[1] Havel challenges Czech patriots to confront "face to face"the brutal but *open* present of February 1969, and not to turn back to the better, albeit *closed*, past of August 1968. Does Havel know what he is talking about when he counterposes August 1968 and February 1969 as a *closed* past and an *open* present? A closed past is above all a dead past, the thoughts and deeds of which have nothing further to say to the present and the actors of which—without regard to whether they be classes, peoples, or individuals—have played out their role and been replaced by others. If we understand August 1968 solely as a conglomeration of words

and gestures, we can be misled by the illusion that this past is closed: the slogans we wrote on the wall those August days are today painted over, that which we then "proclaimed publicly" we should not repeat today, that which we once "promised one another" we can today forget, etc. But the past of the year 1968, is in that the gestures and words either awakened or gave voice to a popular movement, and only in connection with that movement did they acquire an historical significance. The meaning of 1968 does not reside in a conglomeration of demands, proclamations, slogans, and gestures, but rather in the single fact that from just these demands, proclamations, slogans, and gestures was engendered a historical totality: that fact is the transformation of the working class, its reconstitution from being the object of bureaucratic manipulation to being the genuine subject of political events.

In order for the past of the year 1968, in which this hange was effected to become a closed past, it would be necessary to attain the profound and far-reaching transformation in which the working class would again fall into political passivity, and agree to again play the role of a manipulated object. The past of 1968 is, then, an open and, accordingly, living past until the fundamental social and political forces of socialist regeneration voluntarily abandon the scene or are ostracized from it. Havel's presupposition about the opposition of a closed past and an open present is erroneous not simply because it views the past in a superficial and one-dimensional manner. It is also false because he does not know what he is saying when he speaks of an open present. According to this premise one enters an open present the same way as through an open door: for that reason Havel can "observe" or "seriously intervene" in an open present. Regardless of whether an opinion or an intervention (act) is in question, the present is already open, independent of that opinion or act. A false assumption completely disregards the fact that our action, views, and thought open the present, and that, from there, the way we are and who we are depends on whether today is open or closed. A false assumption disregards the significance of the word. It therefore fails to see that the present is open only insofar as we are dealing with an opening present and insofar as it shatters the barriers of closedness, not only in its own case but also in the case of the past and the future. Such a present serves the function of an opening toward the past, and always decides as well (in any given present) what from the past is alive and what is dead. The year 1968 cannot be a closed past already and, owing to that fact, February and March 1969 (and now) constitute a present in which (even today) the working class and the popular movement exist as historical forces that are opening the future and the past. This present cannot turn 1968 into a closed past because in so doing it would be depriving itself of its living source and denying its own existence. That present will be opening and open as long as it prevents 1968 from being rendered a closed past.

A distorted view of the relation between the present and the past is a substantial part of Havel's assumption about history, one on which he founds his interpretation of the Prague Spring as well. Czechoslovakia in 1968, according to Havel, was a country that wished to introduce free speech—something that is, in the major part of the civilized world, a value taken for granted—and it wanted to curtail the arbitrariness of the secret police. And, in view of the fact that, as we learn further, "freedom and legality are the first premises of a normal and healthy societal organization," the popular movement in Czechoslovakia from January to August 1968 was actually striving toward a mere normalization. It was merely a matter, as Václav Havel reported, of "simply normalizing" things. However, if we know that the first great struggle in our modern history for "freedom and legality," that is, for freedom of speech and against the arbitrariness of the secret police, was waged 120 years ago during the revolution of 1848–49,[2] the question arises as to whether or not there exists any difference at all between the normalization of 1848 and that of 1968. In the second place, Havel explains the significance of the movement born of 1969 in such a way that here we are dealing with the attempt "of the system to rid itself of the nonsense that prior to that it had itself diligently accumulated." Of course, by means of the same justification, Havel could apply his own notions of "normalization" and "a diligent ridding of its own nonsense" to the history of any other country, and even to the history of mankind in general. It is possible to interpret the history of France following 1789 as the history of getting rid of nonsense that the system had accumulated. Similarly, the history of mankind is in a certain sense a getting rid of nonsense that people themselves had covered up and yet always produced again.

Of course, the issue is whether or not abstract precepts such as "normalization" and "diligent getting rid of nonsense" do not obscure the specialness and uniqueness of historic events and do not mean in fact a return to a vulgarized indoctrinating sketch of history. The Prague Spring of 1968 did not seek to be, nor objectively was it, a return to that which is taken for granted in civilized countries, nor objectively was it, nor was it submission to that which is considered "normal." The Prague Spring of 1968, on the contrary, was fighting for something that "in the majority of the civilized world" is not something taken for granted, which in the history of previous (i.e., normal) societies used to appear rather as the exception and a world," periods of popular activity, revolutionary maturity, and initiative—in which the direct producers become the subjects of political events and the actual implementers of collective ownership and conduct themselves with practical steps toward a genuine liberation of man—are sooner flashes of light than everyday "normality." The society that was born of the Prague Spring did not need or wish to be just "a normal and healthy social organism," but rather an authentic socialist society negating both capitalism and Stalinism.

In light of the August experience (and, of course, not just that) Havel's pronouncements that "we ourselves are the forgers of our own destiny," or "Our destiny depends on us," take on a particularly ironic tone. What is the significance assigned to these words? Should they serve as instigators of agitation? Or are we dealing with a polemical one-sidedness which constantly raises up against the blind necessity of popular destiny simply an abstract "act of choice?" But history, and that means Czech history as well, is neither a blind necessity nor an act of choice. He who emphasizes "an involved and risky position," "serious intervention in an open present," "an overt act that daringly becomes involved in the tense issues of the day," "struggles against the clear awareness of all the risks," indeed displays, in so doing, personal courage! At the same time, however, he exposes himself to the danger that these abstract pseudoradical phrases might negate a genuine, radical deed.

(1969)

Translated by Julianne Clarke

Chapter 12

NERUDA'S ENIGMA

What carefree times are those in which the past resembles a well-organized gallery of select portraits and illustrations. Each personality is accorded a name, classified and appraised, and the public pauses with reverence before the most important portraits and repeats the often-uttered words: this one was a romantic, that one with a beard was a liberal, that gloomy one was decadent, that one was an optimist, and that one was quite an extreme anarchist. Everything in this imaginary museum occupies a distinct place, each illustration is exactly defined and marked once and for all time. Revolutionary epochs, however, do not like the mood of museums. They reappraise all that has been appraised, they test everything already tested, desecrate the consecrated, break with the established order, reveal the new, unknown, or half-forgotten, and they posit before science "enigmas"—let us say the "enigma" of Palacký and the "enigma" of Havlíček. The essence of these "enigmas" was the inadequacy and conflict between the overall conception and certain facts—disclosed or presented as problematic—which did not correspond to this conception.

It is evident that the traditional assumption cannot rationally explain several important facts. At such moments science faces a choice: either defend the old conception or elaborate a new one. The defense of an old conception consists of various defensive postures: the facts in question are declared insignificant and incidental, and, as such, do not exist for the conception; the facts are registered and explained, or, more precisely, justified by a general examination (the person concerned still has not grasped, and is, at that time, not even capable of grasping the role of the working class). Either that, or the defense of an old conception consists of asking rhetorical questions. ("What else can the personality in question in a given historical situation do?" "We cannot evaluate the person concerned by means of twentieth-century views.") Finally, the facts are recorded, set against other facts, and an artificial or false antagonism is established: in this dialectical alchemy two personalities are

created from one. (Palacký exists in two lives, one as a progressive historian and, second and quite independently, as a "conservative and reactionary politician" as well.) It happens that the new conceptualization in its very essence it is actually linked to the old conception that it only mechanically retracts or reverses. The dispute between the traditional assumption that was only yesterday generally accepted and the facts that can in no way be "classified" requires new ideas and new methods if it is to be resolved scientifically, that is rationally, and substantiated.

Does "Neruda's enigma" exist? I suppose it did: it originated at the moment when Neruda's "proletarian" was revealed and when the May essay (Májový fejeton) of 1890 was justifiably accorded extraordinary significance. This aspect of Neruda's work was in conflict with another indispensable reality, with Neruda's active participation in the political group of Young Czechs.[1] The controversy surrounding Neruda began in this way: Fučík's[2] statement about Neruda's "proletarian" was adopted to the letter, and Neruda became the socialist who collaborated with *The People's News* in fact simply for tactical reasons in order to, thereby, spread red propaganda surreptitiously in the most widely read bourgeois newspaper. According to other versions, Neruda's membership in the Young Czechs was covered up or contrived and totally unimportant. And since it seems that Neruda's fate depends on the Young Czechs, the resolution of Neruda's enigma centers on an analysis of the Young Czechs, with the dying claim: as soon as the Young Czechs turned their backs on democracy and became a bourgeois liberal political party, Neruda had a falling out with them and experienced a long "Young Czech crisis." In this answer, a positive dependency on the Young Czechs is transformed into a negative dependency, but in both cases the key to Neruda's problem is sought among the Young Czechs. Is this positive or negative absolutization of the Young Czechs justified? Our observations will attempt to point out the problematic nature of these solutions.

First of all, Neruda's conceptualization of the world cannot be equated with the program or the ideology of the Young Czechs. Such an identification fosters the illusion that the Young Czechs are that sought-after "social reality" on the basis of which Neruda's work should be interpreted, and, at the same time, more original and authentic realities are forgotten. These are the Czech liberation movement, which cannot be reduced to the Young Czechs, and the social problem of the second half of the nineteenth century with class struggles, European conflicts, philosophical currents, discoveries in the natural sciences, literary movements. All of these in their totality and in their individuality, transcended the horizon of the Young Czech ideology. Neruda's conceptualization of the world was richer and more progressive than the Young Czech ideology. Therefore, Neruda's world view cannot be ascribed to his membership in the Young Czechs; on the contrary, we must interpret his participation in the Young Czechs from his vision of the world. Only thus can

we explain the significance of Neruda as Young Czech (usually identified as Neruda's world view) and what Neruda's conceptualization of the world was like.

Neruda's world view possesses remarkable integrative force. The most diverse and evidently mutually unrelated facts—economic phenomena and historical events, modern art, the women's issue, etc.—are consumed and digested in this world view that cultivates and uniformly interprets them. Of course, Neruda's world view evolves. This evolution is the elaboration and concretization of a democratic world view, but it is in no way a transition or transformation from a democratic to a socialist conceptualization of the world. Neruda's well—known evolution from "Cemetery Flower" (Hřbitovní květ) to "May Essay" (Májový fejeton) from "the poor people to the proletariat," is movement within the framework of a single view of the world, the inner evolution of this world view. Therefore, the issue is did Neruda's view of the world change so substantially in the course of thirty years that this metamorphosis can be characterized by two diverse social groups, that at the bottom and that at the top, the poor masses and the proletariat? Or was Neruda's world view such that through the integration of heterogeneous facts and the absorption of substantial historical events (the social issue, natural sciences, the 1871 Commune, the First of May, 1890) it was internally enriched and concretized, but carried out all that integrating activity from a single basis, a single point of departure, a single fundamental point of view.

I regret that I must be in dispute with a sweet and comforting legend. But let us reread, this time carefully and critically: "With peaceful, steely pace the workers' battalions, innumerable, vast, arrived on the first of May 1890, and they line up in a popular procession in order to set forth with the eternally same step accompanied by the rest of us toward exalted human goals, with a single justice, equally burdened, equally blessed." The conceptual content of these sentences is completely identical with Neruda's concise declaration from 1867: "The worker will establish his own rights in union with the people." In both instances a democrat, not a socialist, is speaking.

However, the problem is far from exhausted. The question remains: "What was Neruda's world view?" A world view is an active spiritual link that binds political belief, philosophical understanding, artistic definition, literary program, and a view of man, nature, and reality in general into an organic whole. A world view or conceptualization of the world is the concrete historical position of man vis-à-vis the world, and this active position is manifest in the unity of practical activity, thought, feeling, imagination, and values. Contradictions (of course, we are referring to real, and not contrived, contradictions) do not violate this unity, but rather consolidate it and more closely define its nature.

Neruda elaborated a rich view of the world. One of its poles, the most progressive and audacious, grows out of the humble masses, from a link with

the people, from a position and sentiment of social exclusion (Neruda "the proletariat"). Its other pole is anchored in membership in the Young Czech party. The backbone of this world view, and the active core that binds both poles and develops the integrative activism at issue, is the conviction that bourgeois democracy is capable of progress and of a ceaseless perfecting of itself, that it possesses sufficient internal forces to gradually transform the excluded proletarians and poor people into citizens with full rights and classify them in a unified procession of humanity in movement. The active core of Neruda's world view is the ideal expression of the powerful and inevitable movement of bourgeois progress that has caught up all continents and peoples. It is an expression that humanizes the world, since it illuminates it with the bright torch of human reason and sentiment, frightening off the ghosts and prejudices of the Middle Ages, the movement that pervades all spheres of reality from economics through political freedoms to the flourishes of natural science and positivist thought. This view, which identifies itself with the bourgeois takeover as with something positive, with something in which one can believe, with which one can merge one's own individual and creative forces does not reject conflict and struggle, misery and despair. It declares and exposes these phenomena because it starts from the conviction that they will be overcome and ameliorated with the development of bourgeois positivism. But it humanizes them at the same time because it experiences them from its plebeian polarity as a negative and insurrectional reality. The Young Czech Grégr, one of the first exponents of Social Darwinism among us, views history as an eternal struggle in which the strong prevail. In opposition to that, the view of Neruda is aimed at the fact that people perish in that struggle.

In the Czech lands of Neruda's time the practical political actors/standard—bearers of the worldwide wave of unrestrained bourgeois progress were the Young Czechs, the only organized progressive political force of the Czech bourgeoisie. That means that participation in the Young Czechs has a totally crystallizing function in Neruda's view of the world. The writer's imagination, relation to nature and people, concept of the universe and man, were inspired by more original and more vital sources than was represented by the Young Czech ideology. Of course, Neruda's tie with the Young Czechs is not secondary or unimportant: he was tied to them by bonds of personal friendship, material dependency, social position, political agenda, and national solidarity. Nevertheless, neither the radical elimination of all his ties with the Young Czechs, nor a subsequent break with their politics and program, would automatically lead him to abandon a democratic conceptualization of the world, to a crossing of the Rubicon that separates democratic ideology from a proletarian view of the world.

Therefore, the so-called crisis of Neruda as a Young Czech does not signify a crisis of his vision of the world; neither in the last decades nor in the last years of his life did Neruda abandon the positions of optimistic

"integrative" democratism. In 1890 he greeted the workers' battalions as a fresh, break-through force which was aligned with a strong current of democratic progress, and whose first detachments would fight for the victory of mankind. In 1890 Neruda did not go over to socialism, but rather he revealed the proletariat as a democratic force. The conceptual content of this revelation can be more simply demonstrated by the alternative: will the positive—that is—bourgeois society (in Neruda's terminology: mankind, democracy, progress , humanism), swallow up negativity—that is, poverty, ostracism, the poor, the proletariat—or will this negativity swallow up the positive? The first view is bourgeois and democratic, while the second is the germ of a revolutionary and proletariat view. In the first instance bourgeois progress is the active force for transformation, while in the second instance the historical subject is the proletariat.

The circle must close. The May Essay, which provoked a reevaluation of Neruda and became the starting point for a deeper understanding, must itself be critically assessed in the framework of the entire opus. The moments which make possible a view of Neruda in new aspects and contexts must themselves be classified in the whole of Neruda's creative work, his personality, and his conception of the world, in order to be accurately understood and explained. Neruda is such a great phenomenon that idealization is unnecessary. We respect the wealth of the democratic culture of Mácha[3] and Neruda, because only in so doing we will be able to appraise the greater part of the socialist culture of Fučík and Nezval.

(1961)

Translated by Julianne Clarke

Chapter 13

THE INDIVIDUAL AND HISTORY

I

In contrast to the usual practice which never takes titles literally and pays little attention to them, I should like to draw the reader's attention to the conjunction "and" standing between the words "history" and "the individual" and to consider its special function. An individual remains an individual, but if he gets into the proximity of history, he becomes either the great individual making history or the helpless person being crushed by history. The historical individual views history differently than the average individual. Does this mean that there are two kinds of history—one for the historical individual and one for the average individual? Is the real individual only the one who makes history and real history only that which results from the activities of the historical individual; or is this an extreme view and the correct position is held by those who stress what the great individual and the average individual have in common and consider history as a chain of events in which all have their share and in which everyone may show his abilities? Which individual and which history have we in mind when we speak about the relationship between history and the individual?

Their mutual relationship seems self-evident and, what is more, seems to suggest the proper approach to the problem, "The Individual and History." If we know what is history and what is the individual, we should also be able to recognize their relationship. However this way of thinking assumes that the individual and history are two units which are independent of each other and which can be recognized in isolation and that later their mutual relationship can be sought. The relationship between history and the individual is expressed in mutually exclusive theories; one maintains that history is made by great individuals while the other states that history is made by superindividual forces (Hegel's "World Spirit," the "forces of production" of simplifying Marxists, the "Masses" in the view of the Romantics). On the first sight these views seem to exclude one another. However by penetrating further, we find that

they consider the other and that they percolate. What they have in common is that they consider the making of history a privilege granted to some selected factors: either to great individuals or to hypostatized abstractions. In order that Man may interfere with history, he must, according to one view, differ from other individuals seeking the same goal, that is, who also want to make history; his historical greatness depends on the degree of his difference from the others. In the perspective of the great individual, people may be divided into two groups: the majority is merely the material of historical events and is subject to history, whereas the second group is made up of individuals wanting to play a historical role; they must, therefore, become each other's enemies. Historical individuals create for themselves a world in which they stand up to those who oppose or may oppose them.

The individual becomes a historical being to the extent to which his particular actions haveuniversal Geltung; that is, bear general results. As history exists only as continuous, the theory of the great individual must state whether history ceases to exist, or is interrupted, in those periods which lack any great individual and in which "there is a rule of mediocrity." If the actions of great individuals do not fall within a certain continuity of events and have no share in creating it, history breaks up and is replaced by the chaos of isolated and discontinuous events. If the continuity of history—created, according to this theory, by the actions of great individuals—is admitted, the particular activity of each great individual clashes with the existing universality of history. The great individual either denies this universality in his words (and by this he does not destroy its existence or his dependence on it), or he recognizes it and becomes the conscious representative of the universality. At this moment the individual proclaims his particular activity to be the immediate expression of universality and History itself is manifest in his actions, Being itself resound in his words. Thus the great individual that first appeared as the maker of history turns out to be an instrument of History.

The results that follow from this approach are, in fact, the starting point for those who hold the opposite view. In the universalist theory the individual becomes a historical factor if through his actions he expresses rightly the tendencies and trends and/or the laws of the superindividual formations or forces. History is a transcendental force, the processes of which may be accelerated by the great individual or may be given a particular historical tinge by him, but he cannot destroy or fundamentally change this force. Whatever the importance of the great individual's role in these conceptions, his mission is not at all enviable for two reasons. Such an individual is a historical automaton founded on the proper calculation of knowledge (information) and will (action); these are adequate elements of his function, and all the other human qualities are redundant or subjective from the point of view of his historical role. The great historical individual of this theory is not identical with the universally developed individual, i.e., with the personality. As the

great individual has the function of an accelerator and modifier in history, a second question arises: will not his existence become superfluous or outdated as soon as both functions may be performed by "someone" or "something" more perfectly and not accidentally (as the individual's existence is considered to be accidental)? The view that considers great individuals as particular beings realizing general laws leads ultimately to the conclusion that their functions may be performed more reliably and with greater efficiency by those automatic institutions that can be managed by average individuals; this is in line with the prophetic views expressed by Schiller, Hölderlin and Schelling:[1]

> In such institutions everything is of some value only if it can be expected and accounted for with certainty. . . . Consequently those who are least distinguished by their individuality, the average talents and the mechanically educated souls, get to power and manage affairs in such institutions.

The logical outcome of this theory of the great individual is the defense of average individuals. The individual may be great, that is, influential and powerful, even while he is not a personality. The greatness in question does not spring from the power which he exercises as the result of certain circumstances and by which he makes history. The individual with the greatest power may simultaneously be the individual with the least individuality.

Hegel and Goethe were correct in defending the hero, i.e., the great or historical individual, against the views of the butler. But the butler's idea of the great individual is not a view from below, i.e., a plebeian criticism, because the butler is not the hero's opponent but his complement. The hero needs the butler as witness to his human weaknesses (he represents a means of making them public); this is the way society learns that the hero remains human even in his responsible and exhausting historical function. The great individual is not only a hero who, through his actions, is different from others, but he is also a human being (he loves flowers, plays cards, cares for his family, and so on) and in this respect he does not differ from other people but is like them. What, however, is indicated by the butler's view and what the uncritical public accepts as the great individual's human nature is, in fact, the degradation of human nature to an anecdotal and secondary level: the human side appears in the form of insignificant details or in the sphere of private life.

The butler belongs to the great individual's world and his view does not bespeak any criticism but only a direct or indirect vindication expressed in stories, in the betrayal of background secrets or in slander and minor intrigues. This is the explanation of why we encounter the ridiculous, the comic, the humorous, the satirical only in marginal anecdotes that have no historical value in this conception of history and the individual. Such history means gravity, self-denial, seriousness; moreover, according to Hegel, a period of happiness is something of an exception in it. The butlers may tell anecdotes about their

masters, but the ridiculousness of a certain historical individual and the comic side of his doings can be revealed only through another view which is inaccessible to butlers and servants.

Both theories, however contradictory they seem to be in details, fail because of their common inability to solve the relationship between the particular and the general in a satisfactory manner. Either generality is absorbed by the particularity, and history becomes an irrational and senseless process in which every particular event appears with a general meaning and in which there is only arbitrariness and chance; or the particular event is absorbed by generality, which means that individuals are mere instruments, that history is predestined and that people only seemingly make history. In the latter view we may discover a remainder of the theological doctrine that considers history to be a scaffolding with whose help a building is erected; the scaffolding, as the sphere of temporality, is of an ontological nature that differs in principle and is, therefore, separable from the building that bears the signs of eternity. In the view of St. Augustine, the *machinamenta temporalia* and the *machinae transiturae* are qualitatively different from what they help to build: *illud quod manet in aeternum.* If the metaphysical assumptions of this theory are repudiated but the view of the qualitative, ontological difference between "scaffolding" (the temporary thing) and the "building" (the thing outside of time) is accepted in a transformed and therefore implicit and unclear likeness, we are faced with a bastard-like idea that has catastrophic consequences. Hegel's "cunning of history" is outwitted. By using and wearing out particular passions and interests, pure generality in which particularity is embedded. In order not to be discredited, generality seeks to turn particularity into an instrument, but this cunning is outwitted. "The scaffolding" with the help of which the building of history is constructed cannot be removed from "the building itself." Particularity and generality are interlinked and the attained goal bears some likeness to the sum of the means employed.

II

The principle of universality and the principle of particularity, through which the relationship between history and the individual is expressed in the form of rigid antinomies, are not only abstractions which fail to express the concreteness of history but also only appear to be principles: these principles are not the beginning and the foundations (principium) from which the movement springs and in which reality is manifest; they are rather deduced and petrified degrees or stages of this movement. In disclosing the shortcomings and contradictions of the two theories, we may discover certain dialectics in which the relationship between history and the individual is no longer expressed by means of antinomies but rather as a movement in which the inner unity of the two members is constituted. This new principle is the play.

Terms referring to plays and games may be found in every meditation about history, e.g., "part," "masque," "peril," "victory," "defeat" and so on; the idea of history as a play or a game is quite common in German classical philosophy. Schelling illustrates this in *System of Transcendental Idealism*:

> If we think of history as a play in which everyone involved performs his part quite freely and as he pleases, a rational development to this muddled drama is conceivable only if there be a single spirit who speaks in everyone, and if the playwright, whose mere fragments (*disjecti membra poetae*) are the individual actors, has already so harmonized beforehand the objective outcome of the whole with the free play of every participant, that something rational must indeed emerge at the end of it. But now if the playwright *were to exist* independently of his drama, we should be merely the actors who speak the lines he has written. If he *does* not exist independently of us, but reveals and discloses himself successively only, through the very play of our own freedom, so that without this freedom he himself *would not be*, then we are collaborators of the whole and have ourselves invented the particular roles we play.[2]

In *The Poverty of Philosophy* Marx characterized the materialistic idea of history as a method "which investigates the real profane history of the people in each century" and which "describes these people both as authors and actors of their own drama. As soon as you describe these people as the actors and authors of their own history, you have came back . . . to the true beginning."[3]

For the time being, I leave aside the differences in the views of Schelling and Marx since I am primarily concerned with the meaning of the idea that identifies history with a play. In the idea of the play as the principle of the individual's unity with history we no longer confront linear abstractions but rather find that the various heterogeneous elements are united through some inner link. The individual and history are no longer entities independent of each other but are interlinked by a common base. The theories mentioned earlier considered participation in history to be a privilege; either they did not explain a number of features or else distorted them by means of forcible constructions which disagreed with experience. History as a play, however, is open to everyone and to all; history is a play in which the masses and individuals, classes and nations, great personalities and average beings, all partake. It is a play as long as all people have a part in it and as long as all parts are included and no one is excluded. All genres are fully developed in historical tragedies, comedies, and grotesque plays. We cannot agree with those who transform the tragic in history into the tragedy of history or the comic in history into the comedy of history, because here one aspect of history becomes absolute and is raised above history itself; this view also disregards the inner relationship among the various aspects and history as a play.

As every play requires actors and audiences, the first of the basic assumptions of the interpretations of history as a play is the relationship of Man to Man, of Man to other people; the basic forms of this relationship are indicated in grammar (I-You, I-We, They-We and so on) and its concrete content is determined by its position in the totality of social and historical conditions and circumstances (slave, capitalist, pope, revolutionary, and so on).

The relationship of Man to Man and of Man to other people may become a play, if a second assumption is fulfilled: each actor or player, on the basis of the encounter of his actions with those of others, learns to know, or may learn to know, who the other individual is and who he is himself, but he may also disguise his intentions, hide his face, or be deceived by others. The relationship of people in the play becomes concrete through the dialectics of acting and knowing. The individual performs a certain historical role within the framework of what he has learned and what he knows. Does this mean that knowledge and action are variable, that the individual performs his historical role more perfectly the more he knows? The real actions of the individual are not based only on the quantity and quality of information (correct or incorrect knowledge, probable and uncertain information) but especially on the way it is interpreted. Consequently efficiency of actions is not and need not be adequate to the quantity and quality of knowledge since rational activities may be interwoven with irrational actions. The relationship between action and knowledge is realized by way of calculation and forethought, by way of premature, timely or belated information and actions, by way of conflict between what is expected and what is unexpected.

The third assumption is the relationship among past, present, and future. In the metaphysical conception of history the future is determined on the general and basic level and is open and uncertain in details: these secondary factors, which cannot disturb or interrupt the basic predestined trend, open up the field of activity to significant and insignificant individuals. The principle of play undermines this metaphysical determinism inasmuch as it neither conceives the future as ready-made on the basic level nor as complete in details but rather considers the future a wager or risk, and uncertainty and ambiguity, a possibility penetrating into the basic tendencies and details of history. Only the interplay of all three assumptions or elements comprise the play of history.

The difference between the theories of Marx and Schelling, as we have cited them are as follows: in Schelling's view, history is both the appearance of a play and the play of appearance, whereas Marx considers history to be a real play and a play of reality; to Schelling history has been written before people perform it and the play of history is prescribed, for only thus may the

> entire arbitrary play of freedom which each individual plays for himself (aus dem vollig gesetzlosen Spiel der Freiheit, das jedes freie Wesen . . . für sich treibt) become something that is reasonable and harmonious (etwas Vernunftiges und Zusammenstimmendes).

This predestination of history turns the historical play into a sham drama and degrades people to mere actors and finally to puppets. With Marx, on the other hand, the play of history must be performed before it is written, in fact, be first played in order to be written, because its course and outcome is in the play itself; that is, it is part of the play, and springs from the historical activities of individuals. Schelling had to place the creator (Providence, Spirit), the one guaranteeing the rationality of history outside history or more specifically outside the play, whereas for Marx the rationality of history was simply the rationality in history which is realized through the struggle with the irrational. History is a real dream: its outcome, the victory of reason or nonreason, of freedom or slavery, of progress or obscuratism, is never decided beforehand outside history but only within history and its events. Consequently the elements of uncertainty, incalculability, openness, and inconclusiveness that appear to active individuals as tensions and things that cannot be foreseen are the constituent components of real history. The victory of reason is never decided definitely at any point: to claim this would mean to annul history. Every epoch fights the battle for its reason with its nonreason and every epoch realizes an attainable degree of reason through its own means.

This infiniteness of history assigns to the present its real meaning as the moment of decision and returns to each individual his share of responsibility for history. To leave the definite solution of anything to the future means a surrender to illusions and mystification.

In history there are not only actors but also spectators; one and the same individual may at one point take an active part in events and at another time only look at things. There will be various types of spectators: he may be a person who has already played and lost his game or he may not yet have entered the play and may view it with the intention of some day taking part in it; moreover there are persons who are actors and spectators simultaneously, who as participants in the play contemplate its meaning. There is a difference between views about the meaning of the play and contemplation on how to acquire the technique and rules, so that the play will have meaning for those who consider it as an opportunity to assert themselves.

Can the individual grasp the meaning of the play that is performed in history? Is it necessary to step out of history to learn what history is, i.e., is it first necessary to lose in history to discover its truth? Or is it necessary to perform the play to the very end, inasmuch as its meaning is revealed to the individual at the moment of death and death is the privileged moment in which

truth reveals itself? Twelve years after the French revolution, Hegel wrote in his notes about the reasons for the fall of Robespierre:

> The necessary happens but each part of necessity is usually assigned to individuals. One is the prosecutor and advocate, the second is the judge, the third the hangman; but all are necessary.

Hegel's necessity, however, is an illusion because he evokes the appearance of unity where there is contention, he obscures the sense of the individual roles and identifies the play with a play which has been agreed upon beforehand. History is not a necessity which happens but a happening in which necessity and chance are interwoven and where lords and serfs, hangmen and victims, are not components of necessity but exponents in a struggle which is never previously decided and in which mystification and demystification play their parts. Either the victims discover the play of the hangman, the accused that of the judges and the heretics, that the play of the inquisitor is a false one: they refuse to play the parts assigned to them and thus spoil the play. Or else they do not discern it and submit to the play, which deprives them of their freedom and independence. They evaluate their actions and look at themselves through the eyes of their fellow players and express this surrender and loss of their own personality in the prescribed formulae: "Ich, Stinkjude" (I, bloody Jew . . . and so on). Since they act and speak as captives of their counter-players, they do not escape their confines, and therefore it seems to future observers that they played a prearranged play.

III

The conception of history as a play solves a number of antagonisms that could not be overcome by antinomic principles; it introduces dynamics and dialectics in the relationship between history and the individual; it breaks out of the limitations of the one-dimensional view and shows history as an event of several dimensions. Still this solution is not satisfactory either. On the one hand, history as a play cannot be identified with a play as such because the play of history differs in a number of essential points from a real play. On the other hand, the principle of the play may be used not only to explain history, but human life in general and, in this sense, a consistent solution must have the capacity to explain the relationship between history and human existence. Apart from this, we must explain why a play may become a principle disclosing and showing the dialectics of history, i.e., ask whether this principle discloses the dialectics of history fully and adequately and whether the play is history's true principle, in the sense of source, beginning, and foundations.

Does an individual turn into a historical individual only if he enters history or is drawn into it, does history originate only in consequence of an

individual's activity? In this view, as history originates from the chaos of individual actions and is the law of relations that are independent of every individual, the acting individual is originally unhistorical and history is constituted only subsequently. The individual is historical only as the object of history; that is, as far as he is determined by his position in the line of time, in the historical context and in the social cultural pattern.[4] Further history appears as an object, i.e., as a product of individual actions in which the objective process governed by recognizable laws which we call history, originates.[5]

If we reduce history to an object, i.e., to the objective process governed by recognizable laws and either resulting from the chaos of individual actions or predestined by a superindividual factor to which the great individual is related as an instrument and the ordinary individuals as a component part, we include in the foundations of history the notion of reified time. This notion of reified time in the theory of history manifests itself as the supremacy of the past over the present, of recorded history over real history, as the absorption of the individual by history. History as a science of past events investigates completed history; that is, is interested in history as it has passed. If history is the object of science and represents the past in the outlook of the historian, it does not follow that real history has only one time-dimension or that the one time-dimension marks history's concrete time. The historical event, which is examined by the historian as a past event and about which he knows how it passed and what its results were, in reality passed in such a way that its outcome was not known to its participants and the future was present in their actions as a plan, as a surprise, as an expectation, as a hope, i.e., as an incomplete happening. The laws of the objective processes of history are the laws of completed past events that have already lost the historicity which was based on the unity of three dimensions of time which are now reduced to one dimension, to past time. These laws have only a general character and in this sense are laws of "abstract history" in which the most essential factor has disappeared, namely, historicity.

The principle of the play might disturb the metaphysical antinomic conception and discover dialectics in history because, in the foundation of history, it anticipated the three dimensions of the time. But it cannot explain its discovery and therefore recognize that the play itself has a time structure and is based on the three dimensions of concrete time.

The relationship between history and the individual is not only a question of what the individual can do in history but also what history can do with the individual. Does history tend to support the growth of the individual or does it tend to support the growth of anonymity and impersonality? Has the individual a voice in history or are the possibilities of his activities and initiative limited in favor of institutions? Marx and Lukács refused the romantic illusion that there exist certain privileged spheres that are protected from the expanding

process of reification. Romanticism petrified disconnected realities in the authentic spheres of poetry, idealized nature, love, childhood, imagination, dreaming, which are powerless historically, and in reified reality in which the socially important events take place; it also creates the impression that the privileged spheres first mentioned are largely immune to reification and may become automatic sources of authentic life. As in the criticism referred to here, historicity was not consistently linked with the individual, and Marx's most important philosophical discovery, the notion of praxis, was interpreted more or less as a social substance outside the individual and not as a structure of the individual himself and of all individuals. The analysis of the reified modern industrial societies relationship to the individual led to practical consequences opposed to those that were intended.

The discovery which revealed modern society's depersonalization and disintegration of the individual, as well as his tragic position within the given possibilities and realities, that discovery which rightly stressed that only the revolution, as a collective action could stop the individual's fixation, failed to answer the question of what the individual should do so long as this reification continues. The criticism asserted that objective reality appears to the individual as a complex of ready-made and unchangeable things toward which the individual may have a positive or negative attitude, accept them or refuse them; in addition it also admitted that only the social class is capable of effecting practical changes of reality, but this does not entail that the individuals should primarily be defined in the light of reified reality or that he exists only as an object of reified processes. By reducing the individual to a mere object of reification, history is deprived of human content and becomes an empty abstract scheme. The existential moments of human praxis like laughter, joy, and fear, and all forms of concrete, everyday, common human life, such as friendship, honor, love, and poetry, are separated from historical actions and events as if they were "private," "individual," or "subjective" affairs. Or else they are seen in the light of a one-sided, functional dependence and become subjects of manipulations (manipulations of honor, courage, and so on).

Man cannot exist except as an individual, but this does not mean that every individual is a personality or that the individual, claiming for himself the right to individualism, cannot live the life of the "masses." Similarly the social character of the individual does not entail a denial of his individuality, and human sociability does not conflict with personal anonymity. If we understand individualism as a priority of the individual before the collective, and collectivism as subjecting the individual to the interests of the whole, according to the slogan "Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz" (public interest comes before self-interest), the two forms are identical in that they deprive the individual of responsibility. Individualism means the loss of responsibility in that Man as an individual is a social being; collectivism means loss of responsibility insofar as Man remains an individual even in the collective.

There is a difference in principle, whether Man as an individual disintegrates in social relations, whether he is overwhelmed by them and deprived of his own appearance so that hypostatized social relations employ uniform and anonymous individuals as their instruments (in which case the transposition seems to represent the supremacy of the all-powerful society over the powerless individual), or whether the individual is the subject of social relations and freely moves within them as in human and humanly respectable surroundings of people retaining their own appearances, i.e., of individualities. Individuality is neither an addition nor an unexplainable irrational remainder to which the individual is reduced after subtracting the social relations, historical situations and contexts, and so on. If the individual is deprived of his social mask and underneath there is no hint of an individual appearance, this privation bears witness only to the worthlessness of his individuality, not to his nonexistence.

The individual may enter history, i.e., the objective processes and its laws, because he is already historical in two senses: he is always the actual product of history and simultaneously the potential maker of history. Historicity does not come to the individual after his entry into history or after his being dragged into it; rather, historicity itself is the prerequisite of this history, i.e., of history as an object and law. Historicity pertains to every individual; it is not a privilege but the constituent element of the structure of human existence that we call praxis. History as an objective structure, and historical events, could not be introduced into the life of the individual in any way if the individual were not marked by historicity before such an introduction. Historicity does not protect the individual from becoming a victim of events or toy in the play of circumstances and accidents: historicity does not exclude chance but includes it. Historicity does not mean that all people might be Napoleons and did not become Napoleons merely "as a result of certain circumstances," or that in the future after the removal of reification, all people would become Napoleons.

The historicity of the individual is not only his ability to evoke the past, but also his ability to integrate in his individual life what is generally human. Man, just like his praxis, is always imbued with the presence of others (his contemporaries, his predecessors, his successors) and he takes over the present and transforms it either by acquiring autonomy or not acquiring it. Autonomy means: first, to stand, not to kneel (the natural posture of the human individual is to hold up his head, not to be on his knees); second, to show one's own face and not to hide behind a borrowed mask; third, to portray courage, not cowardice; and fourth, to remain aloof from oneself and from the world in which he lives and to include the present in the totality of history, so that in the present may be distinguished the particular and the general, the accidental and the real, the barbaric and the human, the authentic and the nonauthentic.

The well-known dispute about whether the imprisoned revolutionary can be free and whether he is more free than his jailer is based on a fallacy: the

dispute is based upon a confusion about the difference between freedom and autonomy. In jail the revolutionary is deprived of his freedom, but he need not lose his autonomy. Autonomy does not mean to do what others do or to do something different than others, but neither does it mean to do something regardless of others. Autonomy is an independence of or isolation from others. It means establishing contacts with others in which freedom can exist or can be realized. Autonomy is historicity, the center of the activity in which the instantaneous and the "metatemporal," the past and future, unite; it is the totalization in which universally human qualities are reproduced and revived in the particular (the individual).

The individual can change the world only in cooperation and conjunction with others. But even in reified reality and change of reality and in the interest of a really revolutionary change of reality, every individual as an individual has occasion to express his humanness and preserve his autonomy. In this connection, we can understand why the goal of effecting structural changes in society and achieving the sense of revolutionary praxis is, for Marx, embodied neither in the great individual nor in a powerful state nor in a potent empire nor in a prosperous mass society, but is rather

> the development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour therefore also appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of the activity itself, in which natural necessity in its direct form has disappeared; . . . the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces, etc., created through universal exchange . . . the free development of individualities, and . . . the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific, etc., development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them.[6]

Paper presented at an International Symposium on "Marx and the Western World" at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, in April 1966. Reprinted by permission from N. Lobkowicz, *Marx and the Western World* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1967).

Chapter 14

ON THE CZECH QUESTION

A great deal is being said today about the "Czech Question"—which still does not mean that it is being analyzed. Analysis and thought are something different from diverse influences or short-term recommendations. When one emphasizes how small, threatened, and insecure his nation is, one is in fact attesting to important facts, but still is not close to the "Czech Question." This is because that question begins precisely where there is reflection on the bases from which national life as a whole grows or should arise. All who have truly reflected on the problem of the Czech people had in mind important historical realities as well, but they linked them or opposed them to the meaning of existence, to truth, morality, culture, decency, and good breeding.

The divergence in viewpoints lies in the point of departure of each: if someone deduces that all that we at in history accomplished and built—whether that something has to do with the state, the economy, morality, science, poetry, education, etc.—stems from our condition of being threatened, insecure, or few in number, from there it follows that we are doomed to be dependent and unoriginal, as is anyone who does not have the focus of his activity and existence within himself but rather in external influences, in coercion and subjugation. This point of departure in all spiritual and political life must lead to a preponderance of strategizing over principles, to the replacing of intellect and intelligence by accommodation, to a tendency toward opportunism and survival, to the well-known popular "philosophy" with two basic "truths": compromise and survive. The first of these prejudices forgets that human life cannot be reduced to the slogan of "survive" and "take advantage," a slogan that expresses a degenerate form of human existence and not the meaning of life itself. The second prejudice forgets that the recommended "reasonability" has very little in common with true reason and that it is actually an expression of shortsighted unreasonableness.

The second point of view on the "Czech Question" is derived from the political nation as a subject capable of setting up, itself and out of its own self the bases for its own existence. This nation reckons with influences, pressures, threats, and force but is not their plaything and is not in its essence defined or predestined by them. It can, therefore, develop culture, health, public life, morality, as its own inalienable and inviolable forms of life.

(1969)

Translated by Julianne Clarke

Chapter 15

THE NATION AND HUMANISM

Words like "utopia" and "realism" have to be considered and analyzed very carefully if we want to discover their true meaning. That which from one specific perspective, under certain circumstances, appears as an impractical utopia, under different circumstances is revealed to be a deeper expression of reality, as the so-called "realistic point of view." On the other hand, apparent realism, celebrated for its closeness to life, will usually dissipate as superficiality over extended periods of time. In the light of certain decades and certain historical events it would seem that the sense of what reality is in relations among nations is demonstrated by the person who starts with the relations the way that they are "in reality," who takes the position of violence, hatred, and nationalistic passions and prejudices. In the midst of such experiences and events the voice of reason, calling for understanding and dignity, is overpowered or subdued as a utopia which is removed from or dangerous to life.

The so-called realistic point of view justifies its existence by trying to call on the empirical, as if this were a witness in its defense. This is so because the relationships among nations are indeed marked by wars, by hatred, by prejudice. The supporters of this realism are thus simply going on what already exists, while their opponents are demanding something that does not exist but should. The arguments of the realists do not indicate, however, that even on the basis of empirical reality it is possible to see that wars and prejudices constitute only one of the elements in the relationship among nations. Another equally demonstrable and objective characteristic consists of cooperation, mutual respect, and friendship. In this equation of so-called realistic considerations the question then arises as to whether both of these—cooperation and war, friendship and hatred, equality and subjugation—exist side by side and create a permanently given structure of relationships among

nations. Is, on the other hand, one of the elements dominant, and can it under certain circumstances bring about a basic change in the structure of international events?

In addition to the above it is generally known that in social and historical events to argue from reality is very problematic. From the perspective of a certain historical empirical reality which encompasses several centuries, religious wars, hatred among the members of different denominations, people persecuted for their religion, lack of tolerance, and fanaticism were all the norm. These were considered to be the natural form of relationships among people. On the other hand, the modern era has a tendency to minimize these phenomena as simply nonsense. This analogy forces us to raise another question, as to whether contemporary relations among nations—including both war and cooperation, understanding and hatred, subjugation and independence—constitute an inevitable historical stage that humankind has to go through in order to reach a higher stage of evolution in international relations. Or, is it possible to take the analogy of religious differences so far as to say that future generatios will look back at the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, with their nationalistic wars and nationalistic fanaticism and oppression, as some kind of sickness of human nature, some kind of darkening of the human spirit. In other words, will these future generations regard this period as a phenomenon which actually did exist, but whose necessity cannot be justified in any rational way?

The lack of a realistic perspective in the above-mentioned question is not found in the fact that it departs from reality, but rather in the fact that the point of departure for this point of view is a very narrow, one-sided, and incomplete reality. In other words, it is presenting what "actually exists" as all of reality. The perspective of reality is richer and higher than the point of view of "realism," because reality includes both facticity (facts), and the trend of these phenomena, reality as well as potential. In this way, therefore, the perspective of reality can in principle overcome the one-sidedness of both mystifying "realism" and unreal utopianism.

Even in relations among nations, a specific form of the dialectic of master and slave is in force. It is evident that a consistent analysis of this dialectic will provide us with the key to understand and to overcome modern nationalism. In this model the complexity and the polarity, the inversion and the mystification of the relations among the nations are exposed to their foundations, and the existing nature of their relations is seen in the light of reality.

The dialectic of master and slave among nations must encompass its genesis. How did it happen that the relations among nations evolved as the relations of superpowers and colonial nations, nations of conquerors and those that are subjugated, nations that are developed and those that are underdeveloped? Furthermore, the dialectic must include a description of this

relationship, where it is understood as a complex oscillation between the real conditions and the perceptions of these conditions in the minds of both the conquering and the conquered nations. It must also describe the ongoing struggle between the nation that is trying to maintain its supremacy and the nation that is seeking freedom from this oppression. In the master-slave relationship the slave constitutes a revolutionary element; he experiences his condition (once he reaches a certain level of development) as unnatural and is trying to change it. The climax of this struggle is the abolition of the master-slave relationship among nations. It means the end of the division of nations into rulers and subjugated, and the creation of a new relationship among nations that are free and equal.

In the master-slave relationship, the slave is a slave in relation to his master. However, in a certain way, the master is also a slave with regard to his position as a ruler. In the relationship of conqueror and conquered, both sides belong in a certain way to this kind of enslavement. The chains that the conquerors use to hold the nations that they have subjugated also serve to enslave themselves as well: "He who is worthy of freedom respects every kind of freedom. He who puts the shackles of slavery on others is himself a slave." We can of course conclude the following from the above statement: the struggle of the oppressed nation against its oppressor is at the same time a struggle for the freedom and the dignity of the conquering nation, whatever the level of awareness of this reality.

The conquering nation does not maintain its control exclusively through violence and economic oppression, but justifies it ideologically as well, citing cultural interests or talking about how the mission of the superior race is to rule over inferior races, whereas inferior races are called to obey. Other means of justification consist of pointing to the lack of spiritual maturity in the oppressed nation, etc. The oppressed nation has to fight for its liberation not only politically and economically, but it also has to justify the meaning of its struggle ideologically. In this political, economic, and ideological struggle resentments and prejudices are unavoidable, as they are deeply rooted in the soul of the nations, and survive as remnants of the past long after the relations between the nations change substantially.

The nations that were oppressed yesterday and are free today are called upon to prove themselves practically, to prove that they are capable of existing as free nations in every possible way. It is not easy to provide this proof, and the accompanying features are well-known: the secretly harbored feeling of inferiority will grow into an attitude of grandeur; the attempts to reach world level will be deformed by an obsessive effort to become dominant, to obtain the lead no matter what the cost, and so on. The ruling nations of yesterday have to prove practically that they have rid themselves of their superpower past, and that as free nations they are capable of negotiating freely with all nations. This change is also difficult to prove, because the superpower of

yesterday experiences the liberation of the oppressed nation as a loss (or as a lack of gratitude) and it fills this emptiness with new resentments and renewed efforts to regain control.

What I am trying to indicate here is that the long and difficult historical period of the abolition of this relationship is also a part of the dialectic of the master and slave. During this time the newly free and sovereign nations are working toward and trying to achieve true freedom as a free and dignified way of international existence—one free on both sides of the remnants of the past, free of complexes of inferiority and superiority, servility and despotism.

There are very few aspects of social life where there is so much prejudice and so many myths, so much "obscurantism" and negativity as is the case in the relations among nations. It would seem that here we find ourselves in the sphere of life least accessible to reason and argumentation, where the irrational maintains its superiority. Linguistic differences and the attendant reduction in possibilities for mutual understanding, differences in customs and habits that are frequently elevated and presented as the national character and which are obvious on superficial observation, differences in traditions and history that are accumulated and evoked through our memories, prejudices, and resentments—all of these factors help to make the soil more favorable for demagoguery and mystification, rather than for argumentation and reason.

Here again the supporters of the so-called "realism" could probably come up with examples to show that at certain historical moments large masses of people followed false prophets. They listened to demagogues, and through fanaticism, outbursts of complexes, and lack of knowledge, they allowed themselves to be led into terrible catastrophes. Meanwhile the voice of reason remained a lonely and desperate cry in the wilderness. The relationship between realism and utopia comes up in a new form, this time as a question as to whether the irrationality characteristic of relations among nations is fatal, or whether the rational can defeat the irrational in this area as well.

It is possible that the ineffectiveness of reason in putting international relations in order is more the result of the intellectual and rationalistic form in which reason manifests itself than of something in its essence. It is possible that reason alone was not strong enough to prevail, but how else can it assert itself if not as dialogue, as discussion, as the weighing of arguments for and against. Do we not, however, in using this understanding of reason, risk having the conflict between reason and existing reality become petrified, because reason in the form of dialogue, discussion, and intellectual argumentation remains within the real world and this reality itself is irrational?

Fortunately, reason also appears in another form. Reason does not exist only as the ability to think, to distinguish the true from the false, but also in the form of creation and objectification. In this sense, technology for instance, especially modern technology would provide a typical example of reason in the form of a product and of objectification. What is the relationship, then,

between the form in which reason exists and the process of reasoning and dialogue among individuals and collectives? Is there a connection between objectified reason and the rational arrangement of relations among nations? Is there any relationship between this objectified reason and power, or the impotence of reason in sorting out public affairs in our century? In other words, is it possible to make the rationality held by people of today reasonable?[1]

These are not just cases of verbal paradoxes. The object here is to characterize a situation which, in and of itself, is paradoxical. The rationality of our era is brought to reason only by irrationality. This irrationality is embodied in the threat of a devastating thermonuclear war. People are brought to reason under the pressure of horror and fear. Fear of what? Fear of the total extinction of the human race with weapons of mass destruction. This threat manifests itself as an irrationality that is forcing reason to a kind of awakening, which means forcing it to reasoning, reasonableness and rational activity. Is it, however, the irrational that is bringing humankind to reason? Or, is it perhaps the objectified reason of man as represented by the latest technology that manifests itself to humankind in the shape of irrationality—with its efficiency, urgency and subjugation, all of which, until now, remained the privilege of irrationality? Can we say that human reason for the first time in history has reached the proportions of irrationality, that it has thus achieved its real power in order to defeat the irrational? One very serious problem remains: is there not a risk that reason can be transformed into irrationality? Is it not possible that reason will succumb to the attractions of power if it acquires the power of the irrational, and thus in the process again become irrational?

These open-ended questions should not cover up an important fact, which is that the objectified reason of humankind in the form of modern peaceful technology—as well as the A-bomb—can bring humankind to reason, i.e., to dialogue, to negotiations, or to the rational or more reasonable creation of reality. One manifestation of this fact is found in the voices of those statesmen who say that today conflicts among nations cannot be resolved through war. Since in the light of today's reason war appears to be irrational, and human reason holds that war has to be excluded from the life of human beings, the real possibility of a world without wars is appearing before nations. The peaceful coexistence of nations with different social systems—nations that are competing in the development of productive forces in peace, that are increasing the well-being and the freedom of the individual—does not appear to be a tactic or maneuver of one or both sides, but rather as an *objective, characteristic feature of our era.* In a world without wars, mistrust and suspicion will have to disappear sooner or later, just as superpower appetites and hopes to conquer other

nations will, because all of these phenomena grow out of conditions where war exists either as an inevitability or as the usual means for resolving conflicts and among nations and states.

Herder's philosophy of history—one of the spiritual sources of the Czech and Slovak national revivals—seems to be old-fashioned in many ways, and certain aspects of it give the impression of being speculative. In spite of this view, however, one of Herder's thoughts should not be disregarded: the relationship of the nation and humanity. Humankind does not consist of a collection of nations, because every single nation represents humanity to one degree or another. In this way every nation takes upon itself the responsibility for humankind, because it itself is the realization of humanity to some degree. Humankind and humanity are not external signs or side effects of the sum total of nations on the earth, but are themselves constituent parts of the nation: each nation realizes humanity primarily within itself, at its center, in its environment. The fundamental divider is not how different one nation is from another, but the differences within a nation. Membership in a race, language group or territory is *determined* for people, but people have to reach the stage of humanity themselves. People are always members of a nation, but they *become* humane.

I believe that the famous sentence by John Hus, "A good German is closer to me than a bad Czech," represents this kind of thinking. In the course of history the idea of good and evil has achieved concrete form and specific characteristics in this differentiation within a nation and in this unity among nations. However, the thought itself has stood the test of time and has proven itself to be the elementary foundation of humanism and of understanding among nations. In contrast to all variations of nationalism and racism that petrify and glorify "given facts" not yet encountered by human activity (in this sense they are prehuman and subhuman), humanism stresses the meaning of human efforts and activities. These are activities that change the natural into the human, the barbarian into civilized and cultured, and for which, therefore, resentments, hatred, and prejudices among nations do not constitute an eternal border dividing one nation from another, but only a simple historical border that can be crossed. It is up to the people to ensure that the attempts to cross this border are tirelessly repeated.

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Translated from the Slovak by Magdalena Constantino

Chapter 16

ON CENSORSHIP AND IDEOLOGY

I

We have a series of expressions which we have heard or read at one time or another, but whose meaning we did not think about sufficiently. Is there a relationship between philosophy and literature? Are they interdependent, influencing each other? Do they fulfill a specific social function? Are we not confusing literary production with literature, and the writing of books about philosophical problems with philosophy? Are we not abusing words, when we talk about literature and philosophy as if they were something self-evident? True literature and real philosophy are such rare events that in the flood of literary production they appear as exceptions. Similarly, in everyday life people do not usually perceive what they see, but rather what they hear and what they read. Their senses are veiled and blunted by traditions, customs, and by what seems obvious to them. Those who produce literary and philosophical works are moving in a derivative, unreal world, and their books echo or imitate something already read or already discovered. In contrast to this, a real work of art or philosophy discloses the world. It sees and describes what has not been seen before. It contemplates and formulates previously unknown and unformulated thoughts, and with this act of discovery enriches reality.

II

In the last ten years in film, poetry, and prose in Czechoslovakia, several works of art have appeared. Czech philosophers also began to think. If, in accordance with Marx, we understand ideology to mean the systematization and the reasoning of *false consciousness*, a way of thinking created by specific social strata and their representatives in order to explain themselves, their roles, and activities, their relationship to the world and society, then the only relationship between art and philosophy on the one hand and ideology on the

other, can be one of conflict. Czech art and thinking have of late found themselves and returned to their mission, which is why they have collided with ideology. In the last ten years the rule of ideology over art and thought has broken down. Ideology is not an invention of our time. What is interesting, though, is the character of this fallen ruling ideology. Its peculiarity did not lie in the fact that it was a mixture of half-truths and phrases, prejudices and conceit, superficiality and authoritativeness, but that this impotent thought was issued forth as science and claimed to represent Marx. Marx's philosophy was born as a criticism of ideology—that is, of false consciousness—and as a method of *critical thinking*, whose only goal was to seek truth (since truth is revolutionary and liberating). This is why there is an abyss between Marx and those ideologists who pass themselves off as Marxists. A return to Marx is a return to critical thinking, and any modern critical thinking cannot ignore Marx.

III

It would be utopian to think that ideology in the sense of false consciousness will disappear in the future. The most important development would be for culture (in the widest sense of the word) to play a liberting and demystifying role in society, and to emancipate the senses and intellect of all who want to see and hear, and who want to think.

IV

A philosopher cannot say anything to condemn censorship that was not said already by the democrats of the nineteenth century. That is why every censor thinks that he is the subject of conversation when Havlíček, Sabina, Herzen, Chernyshevsky, or the young Marx are cited to argue that the suppression of freedom is a violation of human senses and human personality.[1] He therefore treats them in the same way that the contemporaries of these thinkers did—that is, by trying to censor them. The relationship between censorship and the working class is worthy of consideration. Do workers have an interest in censorship, and does censorship benefit the working class as the "ruling class"? Until recently, ideologists have tried to force on society the false idea that freedom of expression is profitable to only one group—the intelligentsia—while to the worker, even in the best scenario, freedom of expression is irrelevant. But workers have found out from their own experience in recent months that the abolition of censorship and the establishment of freedom of expression and information serve primarily as weapons for them too. They have learned that the working class cannot fulfill its leading role in society if it is not truthfully informed about what is happening at home and in the world,

or if reality is hidden from it or information concealed. Also, in our country the working class matured a long time ago, which means that workers have their own intelligence and know how to use it. They do not need guardians to think for them, or to decide what the workers should or should not be informed of. Freedom of the press is, in fact, very much a concern of the working class and of society as a whole. The existence of censorship can only serve as evidence that the workers are being deprived of their civil rights and that the bureaucracy—a politically privileged and uncontrolled group of professional politicians—is ruling in the name of the workers.

V

We cannot mix crisis and decay together. Crisis does not mean decay, but only the exposure of social, political, moral, and philosophical conflicts and contradictions. It means that people are aware of the existence of these problems, and that the need to find a solution for them has become a matter of general concern in society. In a crisis, something obsolete is always dying, and something new coming into being. In a crisis all of the concealed conflicts, problems, and inclinations come to the surface. That is why exposing and disclosing the character of a crisis can provide fertile soil for the arts and for thought. We cannot overlook a peculiarity of art and philosophy in their form as works of art or philosophy. In this form they are creating something new. As soon as such a work has come into existence, however, then the illusion arises that something new must be created, or that the work must be reduced to something already in existence—especially to the conditions and circumstances surrounding the origin of the work. We have a tendency to transfer the new onto the old, the future onto the past, and that which is coming into being onto the already extant. We tend to interpret works of art and of philosophy according to rules that are valid for the development of technical and instrumental knowledge. We can predict what technology will look like in the year 1984, but art will be created by unforeseeable works of art that will themselves primarily determine the characteristics of future art.

Art and thought are always connected with their time. They come out of it, react to it, but they are never mere witnesses to their time—otherwise their authenticity would disappear along with the conditions surrounding their origin. No sociological theory that explains the relationship between art and its time or between art and society can do justice to the intrinsic nature of works of art or philosophy, understood as that human activity which creates something new and enriches reality.

(1969)

Translated by Marie Kallista

Chapter 17

WHAT IS CENTRAL EUROPE?

A month ago I gave a paper here entitled "The Czech Question and Europe." Today the organizers have distributed the main theses of that paper, no doubt in the expectation that I will repeat today what I said then. Although "repetition is the mother of invention," or of wisdom, those who are so fixed in their own way of formulating things that they cannot get out of this mode become simply foolish. When I read the record of that paper I realized that the auspicious purpose of this lecture and the actual performance were not in agreement. For this reason I returned to the text in order to read it over again with the eyes of a stranger, as it were—or, rather, I reviewed it as if it were the work of some other author. I distanced myself from the text as something of my own, and began to play the role of an opponent who would evaluate the text with a kind of condescending indulgence. From his obligatory laudatory comments I could then conclude how far above the level of the paper being reviewed he felt himself to be.

It is possible to sum up the conclusions of this critical overview in a few sentences. The author demonstrated how well read he was, but he said nothing new in comparison to what he or others had said before. The second part of the paper suffered from the greatest deficiencies, where the author was afraid to use the well-tried and elegant turn of the phrase that he had tried out earlier in statements like: "our present crisis is not merely a political crisis, but a crisis of politics." He would have come within reach of the truth had he said that: "the Czech Question is only a question of importance for the whole world insofar as it is a question about the world; i.e., insofar as it is the same thing as asking what the world is." The lecturer in fact fled from this bright idea before he could convert it into a proper thought. As a result, the correct observation that the Czech Question consists of a trinity of three questions—1) What is Central Europe?; 2) What is Europe?; 3) What is the world?—was not thought through to its conclusion. One is forced to the conclusion that the

author succumbed to his own fears, and in a somewhat cowardly manner went back to the nineteenth century—as if he had held a treasure in his hand but, unknowingly, threw it away again.

This critical view of the paper was not enough for the paper to merely be improved, for some passages to be crossed out and replaced by others. It was necessary to completely redo the lecture from the ground up, to decide once again how to organize it so as to get away from materials which had been already interpreted in so many different ways and pay the most attention to phenomena which no one had previously touched on in connection with the Czech Question or what it is to be European.

The Germans talk about "the German Spirit," and the Russians about "the Russian Soul." The Czech language has no place for any "Czech Spirit" or "Czech Soul"; it knows and recognizes only the "Czech Question." The existence of the "Czech Question" does not mean that it is others who conduct power politics, build up industry, promote culture, and who are generally active in all spheres of life, while we are continually only passively asking questions. We are the question, and we exist only as long as we are in question. As soon as we are untrue to this question, and exchange it for what is certain and given, we endanger our own existence and degrade it to a mere illusion. The question is a sign of the greatest activity. Existence in the middle of Europe cannot be rooted in "spirit" or "soul," but only in questioning. That is because this existence is at stake, in a game, in constant danger—often physically, but most often morally and existentially. Attempts to think through and to come to terms with this permanent historical situation concentrate on one question and one question only. A question, as opposed to an inquiry, entails a shock; it also brings pain and anguish with it. Above all it involves a perpetual skepticism, one that examines everything thoroughly. This question consists of complicated and difficult questioning and doubting—in contrast to the comfort of easy answers. It also entails—for every individual, every age, and every generation—continually awakening from sleep, recovering from obsolescence, coming out of depression. The question is always a call to life, a call to go forward. Because of this, every real question is at the same time an exclamation point, a cry, demanding the truth.

The "Czech Question" exists as a question, and thus as an exhortation to thought, much more often in works of a metaphysical nature that meditate imaginatively and poetically about that which is—works such as Mácha's *Máj* or Dvořák's *Ninth Symphony*—than in journalistic brilliance about the so-called national character. This national character is found to be now bad and worthy of condemnation, then positive and acceptable, or in fruitless disputes about who we are and who we are not that comprise a collection of subjective opinions. Recently a sociologizing prejudice has been associated with superficial journalistic impressionism. This prejudice derives human properties according to people's social strata: it attributes courage to generals and leaders,

nobility to barons and dukes, and it assumes that all evil comes from the lowest social classes—from the plebeians. Because the Czech nation has not had any nobles in modern times, it is assumed that nobility of spirit is foreign to it; since we have not had a tradition of leadership and command, we thus lack courage as well. As a people we are plebeians, condemned forever to be uninspiring and fawning. History is sufficiently enlightened (not enlightening!), however, that nobility of spirit has long since been emancipated from the nobility, and from at least the time of Plato it has been evident that courage does not belong exclusively to warriors. Also, Palacký categorically denies the possibility that any given social class of humanity would have a naturally given monopoly on reason, nobility, or courage.

Nobility and courage are universal. For those who do not have by birth the qualities of stateliness and noblesse, nobility and nobility of spirit, all of these qualities are found in the fact that they have self-respect, that they were brought up, and thus constantly straightened out and raised with respect for one's own self, for the "I" which cannot deceive or fail. As a result it knows that the highest quality in those who were not given noble values by accident of birth is honesty. Honesty is the virtue of democrats. That which corrects and uplifts, and does not permit people to crawl in the dust before any mortal man, is their "Ehrfurcht vor sich selbst" [respect for one's self]. In this fear and anxiety for the first time some kind of "I" is advanced and raised to one's own self, and in this struggle for one's own identity the self is suitable not for knighthood but for nobility of character. If someone wants to know what noblesse and courage are, nobility accompanied by courage, courage reinforced by noblesse, let that person reflect on the works of Vladislav Vančura, Josef Čapek, Emile Filla, and on their behavior during the German occupation. The poetry of Halas demonstrates what someone of humble origins is capable of, what courage, and shows to what heights plebeians can go when they do not deny their ancestors.[1]

I. PRELUDE

WRONGDOING

Every catastrophe knocks thought off balance. As a consequence, a nation that in the space of a short thirty years has gone through two shocks is inclined to search its conscience and to look for someone to blame, but it also succumbs to new illusions and lies. Disappointment from defeats does not invite reflection on events, but rather condemns one to further superficiality and naivete. It should not therefore be surprising that voices are beginning to be heard again saying that the fundamental reason for all of our bitter defeats is not to be found in the presumption of fate that put the Czechs on their feet in the nineteenth century and made them into a nation. Once again people are looking

at the different possibilities at the historical crossroads in the first third of the last century. They are not sparing of contrite sighs that the Czech lands could have become another Switzerland, if only their ancestors had listened to the good advice of Bernard Bolzan and had not allowed themselves to be led astray by the extreme nationalism of Jungmann.

Such complaints have no place. There can be only one Switzerland in Europe, and every attempt at outward imitation must end in disaster and give rise only to a caricature. Switzerland could become what it is for one reason, that it is located where it is, and not in Central Europe. Even if the only thing to have come out of those embittered struggles and the petty squabbling of that time had been the appearance of that brilliant pupil of Jungmann's—Karel Hynek Mácha—then nothing would have been wasted, and everything would have worth it. We must not apologize to anyone for our [national] resurrection. (In the poetry of Mácha, his *Máj*—written in 1836—corresponds to the brilliant work of music, *Don Giovanni*, written in 1787. Both of them had their premieres in Prague.)

Because of this we are accused of having done something wrong, both as individuals and as a nation. Karel Havlíček himself thus bears the blame for his premature death, since he did not realize that the Austrian government did not send him to Brixen as an exile, but rather offered him a rest and medical treatment in the Alps, and even covered all of the expenses itself. The short-sighted journalist did not ask the gentlemen in Vienna to extend his stay, and so he returned to his homeland with broken health and died soon after that.

Božena Němcova could have saved herself many slights and much hardship, and lived to a ripe old age, if she had only listened to the advice of her friends and emigrated to America, where she could have found a well-playing placement as an industrial-arts teacher.

And poor Emanuel Arnold no doubt asked for the gallows.[2] He was a criminal and owed his exile to his dishonest attitude toward the rich and powerful: "The worker is always a ragamuffin, and he is the source from which the industrialists' wealth flows"; "the money of the idle industrialist is the lord of the person who works" (1849). Was he himself also not responsible—that eternal querulousness of his!, that incorrigible hardheadedness!—for the fact that he died forsaken and forgotten in the poorhouse?

But the nation was blamed as well. The Czechs refused to be Germanized, and had the temerity to form a modern nation. From that unforgivable error others followed. They did not take part in the Frankfurt Assembly in 1848, and did not agree to being made part of greater Germany. They"betrayed" the Habsburg monarchy during the First World War, "broke up" the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and in this way initiated a whole series of catastrophes, one after the other. They have thus been justly punished for their mistaken judgments: in 1938 and in 1968.

Land patriotism and "Bohemianism" were put forward as an antidote to all

of these sins, and as a humanistic alternative that was not taken advantage of. What is overlooked in this formulation is that the plan expressed in the sentence "weder Deutsch, noch Tschechisch, sondern Böhmisch" [neither German nor Czech, but Bohemian] did not encompass two nations, but only one.[3] Bohemia could not have been a homeland for two nations, nor should it have been. It would have been only a territory where a German-speaking nation and a Czech-speaking sub-nation lived next to each other (in peace and harmony?)—or, rather, where one was on top and the other underneath. The language of this sub-nation would have taken root in the ashes, in the stables, in the kitchens, in the fields, and in the workshops. In order for the people to express themselves in other areas, however, such as in metaphysics or poetry, they would have had to use a foreign language, the language of the rulers. But a nation—as opposed to a breed, sub-nation, or not-yet-a-nation—exists only when the people are able to find expression for everything in their own tongue. (Eigentlich gehört es zur höchsten Bildung eines Volkes, in seiner Sprache Alles zu sprechen." [To be able to express oneself in one's own language truly belongs to the highest level of development of a people.]—Hegel; "A language that cannot explain the highest spiritual truths will decay even if defended by the army, the laws, the schools . . ."—O. Březina).

A tongue that cannot utter everything on its own accord, from the inexhaustible depths of its own wellsprings—but also for itself, for its own pleasure, out of sheer humor, from a desire to be inventive, in order to hear how it sounds and hear its pleasing character—but rather restricts itself to kitchen and work activity, is not a language, but mere carrion among languages. A nation which must use a foreign tongue in order to express the noble and higher sentiments will sink to the level of servants, and needs a mediator over it in order to seemingly achieve that which it is not capable of achieving on its own. Only when a people can speak in its own language about more than pragmatic matters, utilitarian concerns, or everyday events, but can also express all the subtleties and shades of metaphysics, does the dispersion of merely inhabiting an area become focused into the shape, formation, and unity that is a nation. After the rise, however, can come the fall. A nation sinks to being a mere population if the only purpose for its language is to get along in production and consumption, or for distraction and having a good time. This fall becomes irreversible when a nation loses interest in everything which transcends the ordinary and everyday life.

In such an event the language also sinks to the level of a producer-consumer exchange of information, and, what is more, seems to the majority of people to be superfluous. The population is so taken up with getting things, so tied to the barn, worrying about watering places and feeding troughs, that it has neither time nor need to discuss metaphysical questions—even though it is in such questions that the quest for the meaning of human and national existence is to be found. They exclude such matters from public discourse, and

in the race after fictitious productivity refuses to even listen to such disputations, regarding them as idle speech. If the word "slavery," like the Latin "infans," means to be excluded from discussion, not have command of the word, when the *most fundamental issues of the community* are at stake, then the decline of the language becomes a sign warning of impending catastrophe. The nation is rushing into destruction when it stops being vitally interested in *everything* (the whole is a "concrete totality"[4]), and is only interested in something that is *partial*, regarding it as the only thing that is real and productive. After this it is transformed into the sum of interchangeable cogs of a functioning mechanism, and as such can be controlled by anyone or anything.

SPACE

On the other side of the undisputed assertion that the Czechs live in Central Europe there are doubts as to what Central Europe really is. *Central Europe is a historical space.* This statement has a double meaning. On the one hand, it excludes as one-sided and misleading all ideas that equate Central Europe with some enumeration of famous names, or a listing of the nations and nationalities living in the region that designates them merely geographically, thus maintaining the fiction of some kind of particular common culture. On the other hand, thinking is exhorted to search for and investigate the singular properties and the nature of this space and its historicity.

Neither Kafka nor Hašek in themselves constitute Central Europe. "Hašek and Kafka" (1963) was not the name of a literary essay, but rather a provocative reminder of the grotesque and its connection with the modern age. It was also an indirect though clearly expressed toast to Prague, whose European charm was based on the common life together, the rivalry, and the disputes among three separate but mutually interacting elements: the Czechs, the Germans, and the Jews. In her comments about Central Europe in 1938 Milena Jesenská was reluctant to use the word "space," because the term sounded to her like the terrifying slogan: "der grossdeutsche Raum" [the Greater-German Space]. Where would we be, though, and what misery would we allow ourselves to be led into, if we were to give up some basic words simply because they temporarily strengthened ideologies. In that case we would be forced to strike from the vocabulary of Europe not only the word "space," but also words like "nation," "people," "person," "love," "friendship," and "alliances." All of these words can be misused, particularly in an age of widespread advertising and propaganda.

What constitutes the nature and the singular qualities of this space called Central Europe? *This space is a dispute*, a dispute over how to explain the meaning of the space. The issue is not one of interpreting a text, but rather of comprehending reality. Above any possible text, and thus the written word, is the "con-text"—that is, the original unity of action and speech, events

manifesting themselves in deeds, institutions, decisions, proclamations and programs. Central Europe is a space in dispute and the space of a dispute—a dispute over what this space really is. Each of the three explanations of this "con-text" (more on these later) is simultaneously a call and a demand, a direction and invitation for action. Each of the interpretations provokes interference, actions, activities, and different antagonisms. Central Europe as a historical space is a place (the lists for jousting?; a crossroads?) where these different accounts meet and impact each other in conflicts and fights.

The Germans refer to this "con-text" as "Mitteleuropa," and by this they understand Central Europe to be *their* territory. *Mitteleuropa* is seen and incorporated as title to the land, and all possible means have been used to enforce this title: economic influence, colonization, diplomacy, even armed annexation. *Mitteleuropa* is a program based on the assumption that this territory has for ages been part of Greater Germany, and that it belongs under German administration and care. Central Europe is thus interpreted to be an area where Germany has been awarded the role of defender and protector. *Mitteleuropa* is an opportunity and a bid for German expansion—political, economic, and even military—that has so far not been fully taken advantage of. In this territory German *superiority* can be and must be asserted in the areas of talent, organizational abilities, trading abilities, industriousness, sharpness, and perseverance against "lower races" ("eine tieferstehende Rasse") in the local population. *Mitteleuropa* is an interesting sphere and a historical claim whose legitimacy is demonstrated by the preeminence of the "German Spirit," which brings peace and order to that space which has been tossed by squabbles and national feuds, and provides a model of discipline and productivity to the local population. Not even defeat in two world wars has shaken the deeply rooted conviction that Germany has a special role to play as a stabilizing factor in Central Europe. Germany is prepared to continue to play the role of protector: ". . . die Rolle der Schutzmacht der kleinen Nationen im mitteleuropäischen Bereich" [the role of protector-nation for the small nations of the central European region], as was stated in 1964 at a conference on the work of Max Weber.[5] The proximity of the Czech Lands to Germany is regarded as a natural connection that has lasted for centuries. Even one who was a great destroyer of everything that seemed to be obvious, given, did not have any doubts as to the "self-evident fact" that with regard to culture the Czechs are a German land, only he gives them a distinctive name: Böhmerland.[6]

The Russian account of Central Europe is different from the German one. For the Russian nobleman ["barin"] of the nineteenth century, for Gogol and Dostoevsky, as well as for the majority of those who emigrated in the twentieth century, Central Europe was merely a transit point, a regretful place to have to stop, a point of passage on the way to Europe (which for them began at Paris or "Rulettenburg"). This territory was a necessary stopping

place in order to change horses and quickly go on further to the longed-for goal. For the person who was hurrying from East to West, everything that lay in between the starting and ending points was only a barren, uninteresting area—a place only to hurry and rush across, not to stay in and never to settle in. Central Europe plays a similar role in Russian politics. In the calculations of the strategists this space is regarded only as a foreground or buffer zone, an outer circle, which serves as a defensive wall to bear the onslaught and defend the interior of the empire.

For both of these powers Central Europe is a derivative of their interests, which for the most part are quite different. It is not a historical space in its own right, but a mere ancillary territory whose value, meaning, and content is decided in the capitals of these powers—that is, outside of this space, somewhere else.

As long as history is a game whose rules have been encoded in advance into long-term imperial interests that manifest themselves in a wide variety of ways, it follows from this that any plans for carving up Central Europe and putting its territory under the control and influence of this or that power remain a permanent strategy. Anyone who does not take this fact into account is simply living in an illusion.

The first person to think through the "con-text" of Central Europe from the perspectives and in the interests of *all of the nations* living in this space was František Palacký. With him in this exercise was Karel Havlíček. In sentences whose nobility and cadence spring from reading the Bible of Kralice, the Czech historian demonstrated that Central Europe is a historical space whose fate and future can only be decided by the nations that for hundreds of years have fertilized the soil, founded cities and sanctuaries, and imprinted on this center of Europe an indelible seal of their identity and originality. They have made this mark in legends, in songs, and in a wide variety of writings.

As a historical space Central Europe constitutes a resistance which defends against imperial aggression from two or more sides, and through both successful and failed efforts gradually realizes freedom and equality for all nations.

DIFFERENCE

Palacký's "idea of an Austrian state" was in reality the idea of Central Europe, an idea whose presupposition is a specific conception of man and the world. There is nothing local or regional in this idea; it is not an idea shut up in a museum and preserved there. It is an idea where it is possible to reflect on the place of man and nations in the changing conditions of the modern age and its "new standard." Two conclusions come out of this idea. The first is the rejection of the assumption that there are nations intended, predestined to rule, and nations sentenced to be subservient and enslaved. The second conclusion is that people are neither hammers nor anvils, but are defined only by "divinity"—

that is, their relation to (aspirations to) perfection—and precisely because of this people long for freedom and justice.

Palacký's programmatic declaration comes out of these two presuppositions of December 1849, where in answer to the question as to what Austria should look like he answered: "just." Franz Grillparzer answered with an article whose first sentence was: "Professor Palacký has gone mad" (Herr Professor Palacký ist wahnsinnig geworden).[7] How can we explain the vehemence of this disagreement when we know that they were both interested in the preservation of Austria, that both of them warned against Prussian and Russian domination. Could it be that Grillparzer (1791–1872) was accusing Palacký (1798–1876) of not knowing what the world was like, of preferring the world of ideas to the real world and getting the two mixed up. Grillparzer pointed out the difference between equality of rights (Gleichberechtigung) and equivalence (Gleichgeltung). Everyone—individuals and nations—has the same rights, but within this equality of rights there are differences which cannot be abolished. Nations have equal rights, but there is a huge difference among them as well as far as authority, influence, originality, and importance go. Some nations are like the prince of Lichtenstein, with his assets of millions, while others are condemned to poverty and penury.

These differences also have to do with differences of spirit, of course, and not only with worldly fortune. The Habsburg monarchy was called on to guarantee all nations the same rights, but at the same time it asserted a natural distinction between creative and leading nations and nations that imitate other nations and are led by them. The dynasty formed a set of scales that kept the formal equality of rights and actual differences between those ruling and those listening, the original and the imitating, in some kind of balance. The monarchy represented the unity of this inequality of power and influence with the equality of formal rights. For this reason it played a key role, and was the most reliable guarantee for the preservation of Austria. Only the Habsburg monarchy had the power to guarantee equality of rights to all the nations of the empire while at the same time guaranteeing the ruling nations their superior place above the governed, second-rate nations. It is only a short step from here to the idea that the *poet* Grillparzer could not express, but that was called out loudly by Count Clam Gallas without any inhibitions. This idea was that nations existed (and in this lay their greatest equality of rights) in order to live, work, and die for the dynasty. ("Auf den Schlachtfeldern liegen Tausende von tapferen Ungarn neben Cechen, Deutschen, Rumänen, die nur eine Gleichberechtigung ansprachen, nämlich vereint für ihren Kaiser zu leben, zu kämpfen, zu sterben.")[8] This incautious step separates the Austrian identity (Austrian patriotism) of Grillparzer from the caricature that the Czech language, with its highly developed sense for differences, called "Austrianism." Czech humor, from Havlíček to Hašek, is founded on the revelation and the relishing of such differences as: Austrian, Austrian by

identity, "Austrianist" [In Czech: rakouský, rakušánsky, rakušácký].

According to Grillparzer the Czech language was only a tribal dialect that did not have any chance whatsoever of belonging to the four or five leading world languages. At the same time he considered the Czechs to be cursed by fate to be not a [full] nation but some kind of sub-nation. The only thing they were capable of was to imitate the more creative nations. Czechs only imitate, he thought, and would remain in this schoolboyish dependence even if they rebelled against their teachers. To the extent that they were opposing German supremacy they were acting as Czech-speaking Germans. No matter what the Czechs did they could not escape from their lot, which was to be in a derivative and dependent condition. Palacký, the spokesman for Czech emancipation, is for Grillparzer (and for Marx as well) merely a Czech-speaking representative of the German intelligentsia who was coated with Slavic colors.

Grillparzer and Palacký were for the preservation of Austria, but each of them understood something different by this. For Grillparzer the preservation of Austria meant to maintain the division of nations between rulers and subjects which had been in force up to that time, and the role of the monarchy was to guarantee this status quo. In contrast to this view, Palacký felt that Austria could be preserved only if it were to undergo a fundamental transformation and become a union of nations whose equality of rights would do away with differences between rulers and ruled. Austria would necessarily fall if it did not undertake a far-reaching internal change that would in the first place make it into a modern state. The monarchy should be inclined toward these reforms in its own self-interest. There is Austria and there is Austria—they are not the same. Grillparzer's Austria is one where a person's identity is defined in terms of the Austrian empire [rakušánské], while Palacký's Austria is simply Austrian [rakouské].

"Austrian Identity" differs from the "German Spirit" or "Russian Soul," and in self-assured competition with them brings out its specific creative substance, which is "Gemütlichkeit" (untranslatable into Czech). Austrian Gemütlichkeit is an *activity*, in the same way that the "German Spirit" is, an activity that absorbs and shapes the mere matter (materiality) that the non-German-speaking nations of the monarchy have been reduced to. This material serves the creative substance, whether that substance is called "Spirit" or "Gemütlichkeit," so that different things could be formed from it: the state, order, culture, symphonies. Out of the gifts and the treasures that the House of Habsburgs managed and controlled, products and deeds of active substance appeared—and it was precisely these that comprised the "Gemütlichkeit" of "Austrian Identity." "Austrian Identity" was favorably disposed toward the Slavic nations, and to the Hungarians and Italians as well, but it would not permit the natural order of the monarchy to be altered or reversed, nor would it allow those nations which did not have the same rights to become equally enfranchised subjects of historical action. As long as Slavs are identified [only]

with folklore, legends, and the distant past (e.g., as with Libuše, Žižka, King Otokar), then people feel sympathy toward this powerless and fading tribe.[9] The moment that those who are weak and overlooked start to announce that they are alive and to act like subjects, the former admirers are frightened off. They then join together in opposition to this unheard-of temerity on the part of those who refuse to be objects of pity, sympathy, or esthetic admiration—who also apply the principles of the modern age to themselves and assert them for themselves.

At the beginning of the First World War Hugo von Hoffmannsthal joined in the polemics between Grillparzer and Palacký, and in a humorous tone he reduced the conflict to one of a momentary personal misunderstanding. Grillparzer "polemicized against Palacký, but how did he formulate his rebuke? [He said] that Palacký was too German, that he was too influenced by German ideas of the time." Then followed a sentence in which the old prejudices of "Austrian Identity" were expressed with a haughty certainty: "The fact that the Czech Lands belong to us was a fact and the will of God for Grillparzer" (Das Böhmen zu uns gehört . . . Dies war ihm gottgewollte Gegebenheit). The Slavic Czech Lands were as much a part of Austria as were Styria and the Tyrol. The Czech Lands and hereditary lands make up a grand, indestructible unity.

CONVERSATION

Whoever has given any thought to the fate and future of Central Europe sooner or later would have come to the conclusion that whatever happens in that part of the continent is never something merely partial or regional. Palacký regarded the disposition of Central Europe as a matter for *all* of Europe, and Hugo von Hoffmannsthal expressed the view that Central Europe was "Europe in miniature." Such a statement does not mean that the fate of Europe is decided in that area [Central Europe], or that Europe is nothing without that geographical center. Such a claim simply states that Europe cannot act toward its center as if it were a foreign body, and turn its back on this part of Europe.

While we in Central Europe, weak and slight in number, study the writings of Kant and recite Pushkin's verses from generation to generation, they—a strong and abundant majority—do not even know the names of those whose works they should be reflecting on in their own interest and in the interest of all Europe. Their ignorance, however, is our fault. If cultured Europe does not know who Palacký and Mácha were, who Havlíček was, this is because we ourselves have been vegetating in ignorance, as our interpretations have been provincial and limited and fall below the level of these European personalities. None of us has yet attempted to link these interpretations to the European context, and no one has yet initiated an *imaginary conversation* in which the great spirits of last century and this one engaged in a conversation on Europe and

what it is to be European. In this way for us as well they would return to the place where they have always been and continue to occupy: part of European events. Whoever wants to understand not only Central Europe, but also what it means to be European, must be able to begin a dialogue about Europe with people who have never met in this life and who often could not have known one another. All of these people, however, in their own time and in their own place in history reflected on just these issues. None of them can be left out, overlooked, or forgotten, and thus they must be invited all together and asked to say something. These figures would include Grillparzer, Palacký, Hegel, Schelling, Schlegel, Havlíček, and Mácha, but also Hoffmannsthal, Montesquieu, Hölderlin, and—of course—many, many others.

Palacký would have found some powerful allies in such a dialogue, and together with them he could have proclaimed that in the modern age neither the sword nor the knout—nor anything else that springs from the principle of monopoly or monarchism—can be dominant in Europe (including Central Europe). The only principle dominant in Europe can be the harmony of all nations, and therefore the elimination of all privilege and exclusivity. The Czech historian would certainly have welcomed the thought from 1734: "C'est une question qu'on peut faire si, dans l'état où est actuellement l'Europe, il peut arriver qu'un Peuple y ait, comme les Romains, une supériorité constante sur les autres. Je crois qu'une pareille chose est devenue moralement impossible." [This idea is something that could be accomplished in the current state of affairs in Europe if there were a people, like the Romans, that had ongoing supremacy over the others. I believe, however, that a solution like this one has become morally impossible.] (Montesquieu).

In this imaginary conversation the question as to what institution has unifying power in the modern period must come under discussion. Would that be the state, the church, the economy, technology, bureaucracy, or the military? Friedrich Schlegel would have taken issue with Hegel's assumption that the state is the embodiment of reason, and would have shown that the fullness and universality of living concreteness represented by the existing Austrian monarchy is higher than the sheer rationality of the Prussian state. Schelling, on the other hand, would have taken a position opposed to both of them. He would have said that the modern age requires both cooperation and differences between the state, representing outward unity, and the church, representing an internal unity.[10]

Are all of the possibilities for becoming a unifying force that the modern era has at its disposal exhausted by the dynasty, the church, and the state? In this connection the existing literature also talks about Central Europe and Austria, but it passes in silence by the reality that would contribute to a deeper understanding of both the dispute between the two philosophers and the problem of the "post-Danubian space."[11] Palacký, Mácha, and Havlíček

pointed to even further important possibilities when they attributed the founding power of unification not to the traditional institutions—such as the state, the military, the bureaucracy—but rather to the overlooked power represented by the nations themselves (and thus the priority of nations over dynasty, church, and state), as well as community and "homeland." Neither the state as the embodiment of reason nor the idealized professional system with the Catholic church at the peak comprised definitive examples of unification and freedom for the Czech democrats.

It followed from the historical situation of the Czechs as an oppressed nation—a nation over which and against which stood a foreign authority, a foreign army, a foreign bureaucracy, a foreign nobility, and for the most part a foreign church hierarchy—that the Czechs looked around for a kind of power which flowed from their own sources, and found it in the community. (The extent to which the idea of the community determined the entire atmosphere of the age can be seen in the situation of 1871. The Czech democrats displayed sympathy for the Paris Commune, which is a noteworthy fact in itself, but even more interesting are the arguments used: the French workers going against Versailles and the Czech nation against Vienna share something in common, a *freely chosen community*.[12]

SYMBIOSIS

Russia belongs to Europe, just as the Bohemia and Germany do, but this reality is called into question by the fact that in that land, more conspicuously than anywhere else, the caricature swallows up the original and the external imitation deforms the essence. Havlíček saw that Czarism constituted a caricature of what it meant to be European. Czarism imitated Europe, incorporating some external traits but avoiding the essence.

Havlíček described Czarism as representing a symbiosis of serfs and those who were equally in bondage, i.e., unfree sovereigns, joined by the bond of obscurantism and force. Serfs and masters are connected by a common idea, the idea that force is a natural part of reality and that any order will fall apart without it. Czars come and go, but Czarism remains: those who overthrow Czars without first freeing themselves from the curse of Czarism take on in another guise the Czars' methods of rule and fallen life. Czarism was a symbiosis of baseness and arrogance, cruelty and self-torture, humiliation and salvation, limitations and messianism, Philistinism and pride. As such it corrupted everyone—ruler and ruled alike—and shut them into a false infinity in which the same thing happened over and over again, and the possibility of a real alternative and a true (new) beginning was excluded.

The Prussian way also represented a symbiosis in its own way, one in which lords and subjects were closed into one formation and condemned to

coexist on the basis of mutual blind obedience (Cadaverdisziplin). The curt imperiousness on high and the doglike obsequiousness below are both bound up with the kind of faithfulness that is not even capable of rebellion against a manifestly bad authority.

The "Austrianist" variety of the symbiosis was that the subjects looked up respectfully to authority, and the reflection of that magnificence—coaches, castles, luxury, uniforms, fireworks—also fell on them. They searched there for the justice which they could not find around them below. The nobility in return looked down from on high at their faithful subjects with fatherly benevolence, and liked to praise diligence, obedience, and productivity, but did not hesitate to punish insubordination or rebellion. When the "spirit of the times" encroached on this corner of Europe as well it brought with it revolutionary changes, and with them the inevitable narrow-minded and partial complement: "treu und bieder" [faithful and honest], the noble name of "citoyen" [citizen]. In this way the Philistine was born—not only the "Austrianist," but especially the Czech one. The main characteristics of the Philistine are: overcautiousness, servility toward the powerful and haughty arrogance toward the weak, slushy joviality, and surreptitious grumbling. The Czech Philistine is a virtuoso at astuteness. He racks his brains about how to outwit everyone and everything in order to assure for himself an advantageous place under all circumstances and in all conditions. With this attitude he elevates his astuteness and sharpness to the level of the highest wisdom of life.

The Prussian way ("Prussianism"), Czarism, and "Austrianism" are three types of a parasitic symbiosis which corrupts ruler and subject alike and which makes them mutually interdependent in a caricature of coexistence. In this symbiosis the one on top is reflected in the one below, and those on the bottom look at the rulers like looking at their own future reflected in a mirror (coming up in the world, or at least "playing at being gentlemen"). Both sides thus close themselves into sterile reflections. The symbiosis becomes second nature to them, and they live in it as if in an unshakable certainty. For this certainty everything is given once and for all, and flows on like something familiar gone astray. For this reason a mere word that calls the self-evident nature of the symbiosis into question can already provide a breakthrough to a new beginning, proclaims the possibility of a completely different way of coexisting.

Within this symbiosis and in its captivity no one has a sense of humor. Those who participate—those on top and those below—are "dead serious" as they fulfill their roles of authority or subjection, and they show clearly their own importance. It is only through an outside examination that has not been influenced by the reflected glitter that can expose this symbiosis as a ludicrous formation and show the caricature-like nature of those who are acting in it. It was at the moment when Havlíček examined the very foundations of the coexistence of the authorities with their subjects that he began to publicly question the legitimacy of the official duality of "God and Emperor" ("I will tell

you when I dare: there is no God, and there should not be an emperor"—16 March 1844). It was also at this moment that he based bis insight on the incorruptibility of his character, and began unsuspected the revolutionary action that could only end with the fall of the perverting symbiosis. Havlíček revealed all three symbioses as caricatures of what it is to be European, showed them to be ridiculous, and elevated laughter to the status of one of the sources of critical knowledge.

For Havlíček democracy and humor go hand in hand. Democracy provides fertile ground for humor, while humor protects democracy from becoming ossified, and adds ingenuity and sparkle to it. Democracy conceived and realized in this way cannot be merely a form of government, a mere collection of legal norms and administrative regulations, purely a mechanism for voting and election. Democracy becomes a reality above all as an essential kind of existence, and creates a new style of life. This kind of democracy is born in the struggle with "Austrianism," "Prussianism," and Czarism as a liberating and revolutionary alternative to all of them. It of course follows from this understanding that for democracy to really overcome these three phenomena it must not only sever and do away with the bond that—as acts of violence, blind obedience ("Cadaverdisziplin"), Philistine perfunctoriness, and astute meanness of spirit—ties the authorities and subjects into one symbiosis, i.e. an inverted way of life. First and foremost democracy must offer a completely different, more worthy and more human way of coexistence and of being together.

REBELLION

The opposite of the philosophical phrase of Hegel and Nietzsche that "God is Dead" is found in Havlíček's 1852 poetic vision of a *rebelling and executed* god. The symbiosis of authority and subjection is revealed in Havlíček's "Baptism of Saint Vladimir" as the source of complete demoralization. This perverting mechanism links in its workings both the power structures above—the Czar, the court, the army, police, bureaucracy, church—and the subject people below. In this mechanism God figures as a mediator between those on top and those below, and appears in the role of a servant who is supposed to cater to the particular interests, conceit, and vanity of both rulers and subjects. As a whole made up of three parts—the rulers above, the people below, and God in the middle—this symbiosis embodies an illusion. All of the actors are caught in the trap, which maims every one of them and reduces them to the servitude of a flunky. This also holds true for the noblemen on high—their subjects tremble before them and look up to them with religious reverence, and would be glad of a taste of the sweetness of their life. The noblemen also fetch, carry, and serve: they become mere instruments of their whims, smugness, and vanity. They are slaves of the court, which is made up of flatterers,

intriguers, schemers, and especially mistresses, fortune-tellers, seers, charmers (". . . Every court clique is made up of the female sex").

God recognizes the game that both subjects and rulers play with him, one unworthy of them, and finds it a mere fiction of universality. People need God in order to assert their own egotistic interests. Egotism gave birth to God as an instance that is meant to create the illusion of certainty amid the uncertainty of real life. The shopkeeper's limitations above and below shape God according to his taste and into his form.

Among the duties of this god is to carry out the orders of the authorities and to hear the complaints and laments of the subjects. All of these antagonistic, mutually exclusive, and contradictory requests will certainly find a hearing, but he is not so all-powerful as to be able to answer all of these prayers at once. At the moment when God discovers that he does not make up the unifying force of the world, but is rather only a toy used by particular interests in their own game, then he will refuse to obey these wishes and refuse to serve anyone at all.

A symbiosis is a connection among living people, but their mutual interactions are realized in the form of a mechanism. A symbiosis consists of the mutuality and interpenetration of life and mechanism, or perhaps it is rather functioning machinery made up of living beings. The workings of this living mechanism are disrupted and fatally affected by an unexpected blow. God, who up until this time has been a servant and component part of the symbiosis, an internal spiritual connection for diverging and completely unspiritual interests—and thus a magical power that raises cupidity and greed to the sphere of "spirit"—suddenly fails, and refuses to carry out this despicable lackey's service that is not worthy of man nor god. Through this rebellion the workings of the machinery is temporarily halted, and its legitimacy is endangered. The disappearance of the illusory universality creates a vacuum and frees up space. The vacuum created in this way means that space is cleared for a real and genuine universality and solidarity, and it gives the opportunity for a community to be founded. The clearing of space also allows for a wide variety of substitutes to be built and to compete with each other. It allows for an infinite series of attempts to compensate for this missing god using any means possible that could and would fulfill his former function.

This surrogate, continually sought for and never definitively found, was to play the role of a unifier whom the lords and subjects alike could look up to with reverent deference. Both parties would regard the service of this prayer as worship, as a religious approach to the highest value. This common idol would outwardly symbolize the fact that people have not sunk to secular and earthly concerns, to lusts and to mammon, but rather worship in a new divinity of spiritual values. Finally, it would symbolize the fact that the idol put up on a pedestal plays the role of a visible tie or bond—one which would seem to bind together the divergence of interests and desires, but which would in fact mask

under an outward unity an internal collapse, characterized by the complete alienation and malice of everyone toward everyone else.

"The Baptism of Saint Vladimir" does not put the chronicles of old Russia into verse form, but constitutes a poetic vision of the modern age. The action only seems to take place in ancient Kiev; in reality it is a powerful occurrence of our own times, when godlessness reigns globally. The modern age is a comedy without god, godless, which has turned into a succession struggle among the various surrogates. The oddest churches, sects, and factions fight for the vacant place, vie with each other to fill the space made empty by the execution of God. Because all of the competitors only embody surrogates and dummies that are all eliminated in the competitive struggle, however, this struggle is a story and contest without end or conclusion. That which is derivative and secondary, unoriginal and a substitute, fights its way upward to elevated and commanding places, into the space from which God was forcibly evicted. This perversity and upheaval provides an inexhaustible source of comedy. Until a world-historical transformation takes place, until the world becomes a real union, the history of the modern age will continue to manifest itself as a permanent but vain search for (and the substitution and discarding of) new models, false gods that "thunder" over people and give their egotistic behavior a "higher blessing."

In "Baptism," neither Christian nor pagan god appears (as the name "Perun" might mistakenly suggest).[13] It was an executed rebel that embodied the god that the men of the eighteenth-century Enlightemnent subjected to critique. This god does not live in the heavens, but is caught up in the machinery of secular and earthly life. All that is God's and divine is dragged down to earth, and everything that is ideal or expressed in ideas is connected to the workings and running of social relations. It is only as the second one to do so that God risks rebellion against authority: the first rebel, and thus initiator, was the man of the Enlightenment ("intellectual," journalist) who was put into jail by the authorities because he revolted against God, and thus undermined their authority. By rebelling God is continuing in the work of critical reason. The intellectuals—men of the Enlightenment—had to first revolt against God, recognize in God the idealization of inverted social conditions, in order for God—suddenly enlightened and recognizing how unpleasant his servile position was—to also dare to rebel, *after* them and *under* their spiritual influence. Both rebels—the intellectual and God—are sentenced to death by the temporal powers, for the sake of maintaining order and in the interests of justice. Just to be on the safe side the condemned god is first dragged by horses; only then is the real sentence, execution by drowning, carried out—in order to ensure that a merciful river would not wash up a living body onto the shore.

God has been executed, and a time of godlessness has begun. The era of a fictional universal divinity has passed; the murder of God is a shaking event

that has left its mark. A time of provisionality and confusion has begun. The symbiosis of rulers and subjects has lost its authority. It only survives and passes on until it is finally replaced by a society that will do away with outmoded divisions into rulers and subjects, and give everyone equal rights by changing people into active components of an abstract system that produces wealth but which is devoid of any spark of the divine and poetic.

Two intertwined political questions from Havlíček form the background for this poetic vision: "What is community?" and "How are genuine politics, historical depth and dramatic character possible?" The questions sound like this: is community possible in an era of universal and total godlessness, of perpetual provisionality, when honor and honesty have been excluded from the foundations of human coexistence? How are community and universality possible if people are consigned to the tender mercies of particular interests and are egotistically obsessed in their actions? How can community exist if people do not recognize anything in common that would bond them together with each other, with nature, in space, in time—when they understand only their limitless greed?

DELAY

It is childish to master history and to prescribe how it should have been. Equally one-sided, however, is a concealed fatalism that only perceives a succession of ready-made results and overlooks the fact that history consists of the contention and the interpenetration of accomplished intentions and successful actions with squandered opportunities and wrecked attempts. The ruling circles of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy had plenty of time after 1867 [when Hungary gained autonomy within the Empire—ed.] in order to endorse, and in their own interests carry through, the transformation from a dual state to a triple one. When under the impression that the war was lost some people began to be interested in such a possibility in 1918, it was already too late. This tardiness, however, and loss of a promising opportunity, did not after all constitute a bare nothing or futile meaninglessness: the delay is also a historical fact, with its own effects and consequences. A historical fact is a realized possibility that has excluded, defeated, or rejected other possibilities, and has demoted them to the status of wasted opportunities. Did Austria have to fall? This fall became a necessity and a historical fact when a succession of occurrences coming one after another excluded from events the possibility that Austria could be saved. Austria could have been saved only by reform; the idea for this reform was put forward and proposed to everyone by Palacký from 1848 onward.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire ceased to exist in 1918. Was this collapse necessary? Or, was the fact of its disappearance the result of the encounter of

different possibilities, one of the most important of which was Palacký's suggestion that Austria be transformed into a democratic union of nations with equal rights? It was only when this possibility was discarded, when it was suppressed and failed, that the reality which led to the disappearance of the Habsburg empire came into being.

It is possible to criticize Palacký and Havlíček for attempting the impossible with regard to the Habsburg monarchy, for expecting democratic actions from a power which was reactionary and undemocratic through and through. Such a criticism is only partially justified though. According to a sober political calculation the Habsburgs were a lesser evil for the Czech national cause and for democracy in Central Europe than were Czarism or "Prussianism." Palacký proposed his solution not only to nations, but also to the ruling circles of the great power of the time. The fundamental thought of this solution was the following: Austria will survive only on the condition that it reform and transform itself into a federation of nations with equal rights who will all feel equally at home in this federal state, with no fears for their freedom, full rights, or nationality. What kind of Austria? Not a German one, not a Slavic one, but a just one. What kind of Austria? Not one characterized by an "Austrian identity" (in the sense of Grillparzer), nor one of "Austrianism" (in the form of a ruler-subject symbiosis), but one that would consistently be freethinking.

There was a possibility that the Habsburg dynasty would become a modern monarchy modeled after the British system, and thus remain in the form of a symbol of unity and equal rights in a Central European federation. There is some slight evidence to show that the imperial house was aware to some extent of this calling when it claimed its place to be that of a power that must act with impartial favor and with equal kindness toward *all* nations of the monarchy. In the Foreword to the first edition of Grillparzer's collected works, Heinrich Laube explained why the Viennese court cooled after displaying some initial enthusiasm for the drama "King Otokar" when it premiered in 1825, and then behaved with some reserve: it was not politically profitable for the Habsburgs to remind the vanquished nations in the empire of their fate ("Es passt in dieses System nicht, dass die Unterwerfung Böhmens unter das deutsche Macht- und Kulturgebiet gefeiert würde.") ["It would not do in this system for the subjection of the Bohemians to the German sphere of power and civilization to slacken."—vol. 6, p. 147].

Palacký's conception of Central Europe was simultaneously an exhortation and a warning. It constituted an attempt to preserve Austria, but with the knowledge that without far-reaching internal reform it must one day fall. There were two famous expressions, one of which was: "If the Austrian state did not exist, in the interests of Europe—even of humanity—we would have to do everything in our power to create it as soon as possible." (Written to the

Frankfurt Assembly in 1848). The second expression went as follows: "We were here before Austria, and we will be here after they have gone!" (1865). Both of these expressions are talking about the same thing, and are only apparently contradictory. The subject of Central Europe is made up of nations that are searching—in conflicts, mistakes, misunderstandings—for a way of coexisting and being together. They are conducting this search solely in order to guarantee their own independent identity, and at the same time create a mutual respect among everyone as participants in one freedom and one justice. The structure of the state—federation, confederation, independent formations—is a derivative of this subjectivity and sovereignty among the searching nations.

The history of Central Europe is characterized by a search for a power (and its symbol) which would unite differences, overcome centrifugal tendencies, and surmount particularism and intolerance—not through external pressure and brute strength from above, but because of an internal desire for this solution. Such an order comes out of an inner power, and is different from that kind of order imposed by external force. The question then is whether nations as historical subjects will look for this unifying power outside of and above themselves, or whether they will discover it in themselves and understand that every one of them independently and all of them together have the symbol of that unity in their own hands. History is a game full of surprises and unforeseeable events. Because of this fact no one can be certain in advance how many subjects will be participating in these events. No one can know who will be able to identify themselves with the unmistakable sign with which their inalienable contribution to the common cause and the kinship associated with that will be demonstrated.

Because of this the fate of Central Europe depends to a large degree on the issue of how many parts the ring is broken into, when each part is an exhortation for the other parts to focus on transforming the fragmentary nature of their existence into the whole and perfection of one formation. Nations may be temporarily kept down by force, by a false idea—i.e., ideology—or by a combination of both. No matter how this grip is dealt with, there is still the danger that the nations will succumb to particularism or to malice, and all that would remain of the ideas would be the naked interest of each one of them.

Austria collapsed in 1918 because the deciding political forces lost their historical chance, and because their political reasoning started to work too late. Any nostalgia for the "good old days" in Austria is a variation and continuation of the lack of understanding that brought about the fall in the first place.

The formation of an independent state in 1918 represented the crowning achievement for the political efforts of the nineteenth-century Czechs. The culmination of the nineteenth century for the Czechs was in 1918, but it was that year that marked the beginning of an entirely new century. It is possible to understand the essence of this new century in the ideas that Masaryk used to

explain "world revolution": as a dispute between democracy and theocracy. Czech political thinking is outdated; it is stuck in the ideas, possibilities, and variants of the last century. The Czechs became ossified in their political analysis. In the meanwhile, not only were completely new historical forces swept to the fore by real progress, but new subjects and competitors in the historical decision-making process were as well. The concept of "Czecho-Slovakism," which assumed the existence of a unitary nation with two parts—Czech and Slovak—does not have the depth nor the penetration of Palacký's idea. "Czechoslovakism" is not an idea, but is a temporary pragmatic conception that deceives both itself and historical reality.

Does history repeat itself? It does, but differently every time. Does history repeat itself? History does not repeat itself; in historical events the same things happen, only differently and in other guises. History consists of the acting out of a finite number of basic situations in an endless number of different conditions and of people's actions. Because historical actors confuse an infinite variability of conditions, costumes, and particular circumstances with a limited number of basic situations, they fall into the same trap that their forebears did and make the same mistake. This outcome holds true even though they act in the belief that they have learned that lesson and are now playing an entirely different game.

It is possible for the Czechs to get into a situation where they will duplicate the limitations of their earlier adversaries. In this situation they would play the comical role of enlighteners, or moralists who understand nothing, in relation to the newly awakening historical subject: the Slovaks. Delay does not understand the times, and remains at a historical stage that already belongs to the past. It does not just come late and miss out, but above all it does not comprehend what is going on—not only *around* the actors, but primarily *with* them. Delay lives outside of the present, and confuses the three-dimensionality of historical time with the one-dimensionality of past history. Because of this it continually exposes itself to the danger that it will let slip a unique historical opportunity.

II. EXTINCTION

Central Europe ceased to exist in 1938–39. This breakdown became a fact with the destruction of the formerly independent states and their degradation to the status of dependent territories of *two* militant superpowers. This degradation took different names: "Anschluss," "Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren," "The Slovak State," "General Gouvernement," etc.[14] In the changing of borders and fall of states, however, phenomena were rising to the surface that were tied to the very essence of the modern age. The names of these phenomena were: Munich, Auschwitz, Caries.

CENTER

In the disappearance of Central Europe the loss of the center is announced. A catastrophe in one part of Europe becomes a sign warning that the entire continent has lost its center, and that humanity has gone to the periphery. Humanity then becomes marginal and something merely derivative. All reversals and upheavals, whatever they may be called, are only component parts of processes in which the periphery gains ascendancy over the center, takes people away from the center, and takes root in this newly vacated place as a false center. Humanity, displaced from the center, no longer lives in harmony with nature and time, space and poetry, but remains subservient to them.

In the collapse of Central Europe a danger appears clearly that all of Europe falls into. Europe, deprived of its center—European identity—sinks into mediocrity and gets by on procuring: it does not focus, but only procures. The only measure that the majority recognizes is average, and this is the standard with which to judge everything that it comes into contact with.

What is this central point around which everything turns, to which all attention is given, which is at the center of everyone's interest? The modern age has accumulated an infinite amount of knowledge about everything possible, but it knows nothing—or next to nothing—about that which is most important, i.e., about what is really going on. It produces, and like an assembly line, disgorges unprecedented quantities of artifacts, useful things, the oddest devices and apparati, but it does not have the power to provide a foundation for anything at all. The modern age is driven by desires of all kinds—the desire to rule, to possess, to become famous and always be in the limelight—but the desire for truth and justice is missing. All possible care and attention are given to what is not important, the task of finding the greatest variety of ways for making life more comfortable takes on symbolism, but there is no time for what is essential and most important.

Rilke and Heidegger use the term "Americanism" to describe this fall into superficiality, but this depiction is misleading. The threat to Europe does not come from outside, from somewhere else, but from inside Europe itself. It comes from the very essence of the change that occurs when that which is secondary appears to be central, and when everything revolves around this false center in a rotation of devastation and voiding. Europe did not fall into bondage to some other culture or continent, but was led astray by processes that are in themselves particular features of the modern age. In this age what is marginal occupies the most important place, and what is secondary rules over the essential. The essential in turn is constantly and explicitly forced to the margins, and for the "normal" majority of people, as well as for the "intellectual" minority, it becomes ludicrous nonsense.

In the midst of the rushing current of things that pass by, disappear, wear out in everyday use—things that are ready-made, cars, foodstuffs, paper—culture preserves things that are exceptional and unique. Examples of these things would be a well, a solitary tree in a field, an eagle, and a belfry which humanity and poetry go through from generation to generation. Only a harmonious linkage of both of these kinds of things, the ordinary and the exceptional, can give an era fullness and substantiality.

THE MUNICH SYNDROME

Evil is also resourceful, unless for some reason it lacks a creative and liberating imagination. As late as the Spring of 1968 politicians were solemnly promising that there would be "no new Munich," and writers of all kinds vied with each other to give accounts of what should have been done in the Fall of 1938, but not many months later Munich happened again. What kind of timely hint could have warned the Czechoslovak president with the unbelievable prediction that the main blow to Prague would be delivered by its allies, whose betrayal is what made the German aggression possible? And who could have advised the leaders in the Spring of 1968 whom to take defensive measures against, when it was Czechoslovakia's allies themselves that carried out the armed invasion, when in this case betrayal and aggression were thus embodied in one historical person? We can thus state that the "experts on history"—who are swimming in knowledge about what should have happened back at the time of Munich, and who in addition freely dispense historical advice—falter and simply do not know anything when they have to say something about what is going on now, or what danger is actually threatening the country. They are not able to identify the threat that is hanging over people's heads, including both those people who make history and those who study it. Their profound ignorance consists of the fact that their well-meant assurances that "this time we will defend ourselves" weigh heavy at a time when danger is not only to be found in this or that new version of Munich—that is, from new versions of the Munich syndrome—but in the Munich syndrome itself, in its very essence.

The Munich syndrome capitulates before forces that want to take Europe's identity away from it and bring about an unbearable division within it. In order for the "true" Europe to live in peace and prosperity it condones as normal and accords recognition to a caricature of Europe existing next to it. This caricature of Europe was represented by the two militant powers that shared in the dismemberment of Central Europe in 1938–1939.

The Munich syndrome is a tragedy in which there are four actors. The first is the aggressor, who publicly and unscrupulously occupies, takes, or swallows up another country. The second actor is the victim, which cannot defend itself (or does not know how to) against such an attack, and is thus easy prey. The third actor is a figure full of inconsistencies. This figure represents

those who do not agree with the aggressor and his expansion, and even condemn this action verbally, but who at the same time display no courage nor anything else to show how insightful they are in recognizing that the aggressor represents the fundamental evil of the era and opposing him. In this vacillation and ambiguity they are willing to tolerate the aggressive behavior, or at least wink at it and express moralistic adages to the effect that "every age demands a sacrifice." The last actor represents those who capitulate, who conclude a written or secret pact with the aggressor and then justify their actions by saying that it is better to live than to disappear, who state that to give way to aggressive expansionism does not mean that all hope is gone. Aside from these main actors there are also other, supporting and secondary, roles in the Munich syndrome. Some of these roles are: traitors, collaborators, informers, cowards, and recreants.

The aggressor is thrown a victim that conventional wisdom judges to be unimportant—one located somewhere on the periphery that other countries can live without—in order to slow or stop the movement of the attacker. Others are sacrificed, those who are different or foreign. This act of appeasement is always defended with the same formula: it is better to give in to something in order to safeguard the security and stability of the majority, or of all. Max Scheler once observed that it is those who are defenseless, who do not have the strength to gain the upper hand and defend themselves successfully, who fall victim to modern aggressiveness: women, children, nature. The philosopher did not hesitate to identify this aggressiveness with contemporary capitalism. In the second half of the twentieth century the list of victims of ruthless aggression has been expanded to include more and more entries, such as towns, the countryside, language, the soul.

It is possible to see in the Munich syndrome what it means to not keep your word and go back on promises. When one's word is broken, every word is affected, words as such. Words are changed into empty sounds. Words are empty when they have lost their power to call and to evoke. They are empty when they no longer constitute a summons to action, to be faithful, to companionship, to bravery, and sink to being mere speaking to the wind. When the word loses its power, and speech is shut up in powerlessness, responsibility also disappears. The fundamental unity of words and actions is destroyed, speech is degraded to barren speaking, and action becomes mere arranging of comforts and an empty lifestyle. In the divorce of words and deeds speech is transformed into mere talking and the utterances of beautiful words (about morality and love), under which surges the dirty current of real wheeling and dealing and getting rich quick.

When one gives one's word it is binding, and calls one to responsibility. Whoever has given a promise has taken upon himself an obligation to keep his

word, and thus demonstrate his character. When one gives one's word and it has no value then space is opened up for a total lack of character and for recreancy.

THERESIENSTADT

The names of cities symbolize the particularity of historical events, and it is for this reason that a connection can exist between Munich and Auschwitz. The pact negotiated in the Bavarian metropolis paved the way for the disappearance of Central Europe, and dealt a mortal wound to European identity. Without Munich there would not have been an Auschwitz. Illuminated by the Second World War we now read Oswald Spengler's expression from the Fall of 1919—"das wirkliche Europa hört an der Weichsel auf" [the real Europe ends at the Vistula]—as an ironic forecast telling us that Europe ends, i.e., dies, by the Vistula: at Auschwitz.

A direct road leads from Munich to Auschwitz, but a stop along the way and a transfer point is in Terezín—or, more precisely, at the place where the ancient town of Terezín was transformed into a transit concentration camp. This transformation constitutes an absolutely isolated case. Normally one sets up camp in a "wide field," on a plateau, where one stays for several days and then moves on somewhere else, to another campsite. The transformation of the town of Terezín into a camp called Theresienstadt meant that brick and stone houses remained, but served as temporary housing. The streets remained, but changed into blocks within the camp. The town square also remained, but became the Appelplatz [the place where roll call was held each day].

What was happening in this transformation of a town into a camp? What is the meaning of the fact that in 1941 a fortress town from the late Baroque era became a transit camp, a transfer station on the journey to the gas chambers? What does this transformation have to say about that era, and in what way is it connected to the disappearance of Central Europe? At the confluence of two rivers—of which one, the larger, was recorded by Strabon as the Albis (Elbe, Labe), belongs to the European basin, and constitutes a unifying and dividing boundary—a hybrid and bastard formation suddenly appeared, literally overnight. This formation was a town-camp, an enclosed town in a state of permanent martial law, a formation which functioned as a transshipment point for human material brought in from all over Europe and sent on to the final destination: death. It is only at the moment when Central Europe has been destroyed, crushed, wiped from the map of history, and when the town of Terezín is transformed into the transit camp Theresienstadt—it is only then, not earlier, that the trains from occupied Europe can bring together Jews from all over Europe to their designated place, to Auschwitz. A hitherto unknown place by the Vistula suddenly falls into a space that is no longer a divide

between two aggressive powers, a protective opening where European identity resides. As Auschwitz it becomes an integral part of another space—a military camp, a battleground, a strategic foreground or background, a prospective territory for colonization and expulsion. Auschwitz could only become the end of the line for millions of people, with the designation "Endlösung" [Final Solution], because the Munich syndrome cast them out of the space in Europe for *Europeans* and threw them into the *closed* space of the camp and the system of camps.

Philosophers interpret the Greek word "logos" as events, as an assembly, and as concentration. "Logos" means, in the words of Ferdinand Lassalle, "sowohl sagen als sammeln" [speak as well as concentrate]. Do the mass collection points for people that are called camps have anything in common with the original meaning of the Greek word? Do the concentration camps reveal the *logos* of the modern age? Is the modern age characterized by the fact that people, masses, are assembled and concentrated into collection points and into camps of the most different kind—work camps, reeducation camps, correctional camps, military camps, as well as concentration camps and extermination camps. Is not all of humankind in the modern age divided into two or more camps—into the camp (world) of "our kind," and the "enemy" camp (world)? Does the gathering and concentrating ("sammeln") that the modern age carries out represent a cruel joke, a mockery and caricature of the Greek word "logos," or, within the reality of all of the different kinds of camps, is a shift taking place from the *logos* of antiquity to the modern-day "ratio?"

There was nothing reasonable in the extermination camps, yet over their existence reason left the state: reason cannot comprehend their meaning. Reason does not understand why these camps were set up, but this just goes to show how little it understands all of the events of the modern age and how blindly it identified with one form of reason, that called "ratio." Nihilism, the fateful sign of the modern age, annihilates in order to destroy, and it *does not give reasons* for this action. Destructiveness does not know or recognize rational argumentation. The destructiveness that sends millions of people to the gas chambers senselessly and groundlessly is the most blatant manifestation of the destructiveness that afflicts the entire modern age. This destructiveness survives even though the concentration camps have been done away with, and is not dependent on them. This destructiveness destroys nature because it degrades nature to a storehouse of raw materials and energy. It destroys the soul, and dissolves it into manipulable mental processes. It has already attacked cities and the countryside, it despoils speech and receptivity, and its side effects are indifference, ill-humor, and boredom.

The intrinsic characteristic of the systems known as "totalitarian" is not the existence of concentration camps, per se, but the whole *camp system*—that is, the transformation of the entire society into a sole gigantic camp, directed and guarded by an organized minority that carries out the policing functions of

a bureaucratic and military dictatorship. This militant minority also presumes to control and master history: "Die Geschichte will geführt sein. Führung ist ein Wort, das es nur im Deutschen gibt" [History is meant to be directed. Leadership is a word that only exists in German].[15] The transformation of the entire society into a camp, and the rule of the camp system over people, means that two essential dimensions of human existence are eliminated or suppressed: the *metaphysical* dimension (replaced by ideology), and the *civic* dimension (replaced by militant party identification). The totalitarian destruction of civil society (a society of citizens, not only producers and consumers), the exclusion of the citizen from public events, and the introduction of a dichotomy between the leaders (functionaries, apparatchiki) and the led (those who carry out orders and obey) is accomplished with the slogans about revolution against the bourgeoisie and (or) the plutocracy. In his time Hegel warned against the danger hidden in the German word "bürgerlich," which if not differentiated blurs two meanings: bourgeois and citizen. Because for the spiritual founders of Nazism "bürgerlich" meant not only venality and corruption, but also parliamentary democracy on the Western model, the destruction of civil society was carried out in 1933. It was replaced by a disciplined camp in the form of a national revolution against plutocracy.

It is only as a disciplined camp led from above that society can become exclusively and arbitrarily the disposable property of those who rule and in whose hands political power is concentrated. It is in this particular way of appropriating that two things are achieved. On the one hand is the absolute claim of the minority in power (der Führer, die Partei) to a monopoly on leading the nation and the masses. On the other is the unconditional submission of those who are led and controlled, who have only one possible avenue of action: to fulfill orders and directives from above. Slogans of the time and verbal idioms reveal clearly how in this camp system the nation and society are reduced to the status of the property of an uncontrollable minority in power who dispose of this property of theirs arbitrarily. The complement to the expression "Der Führer und *sein* Volk" is the saying "Die Partei und *ihre* Massen."[16] It would not do, of course, for this statement about "totalitarian" systems to obscure the fact that the market also appropriates people in its own way, as it throws them into its workings and transforms them into *its own* appurtenances.

The camp (Lager, campus) expresses an entirely unique dynamic and mobility, which has mastered the twentieth century and which is manifest in the tendency to mobilize everything. Modern man approaches everything as a manipulable object—as something that is always on order, on call, that must be available at any time, to be disposed of in any way he wants. This universal tendency to mobilize everything is not a consequence or manifestation of militarization, but rather represents the entire fundamental relationship of modern man to the world. In addition, this mobility comes into being as

liquidity and as liquidation, as the dissolution of reality and things into controllable and manageable processes. It is also the art of transforming everything that defies or resists—that disagrees or is out of step—into something liquid and smooth, something that can be made a part of the mainstream. The liquidation of opponents is merely a component part and an extreme manifestation of this general *dissolution* into processes of animation, stream, march, acceleration. Even great minds, such as György Lukács, were taken in by the illusory nature of this phenomenon and did not see the perversity and inversion that it represented. They took the phenomenon at face value to such an extent that they elevated it to a principle of a philosophical method, the dialectic. The famous saying that the dialectical method dissolves "fetishistic objects into processes that are taking place among men" and that reality is a "complex of processes" is in fact not a characteristic of the dialectic as a method, but is rather an idealization of the unexamined inversion of the modern age.[17]

For the universal mobility of the modern era transportation is regarded as the third most important necessity. By "transportation" is meant to move from place to place, be continually on the move, march without pause, hurry, outrun, and aspire to get ahead. None of these processes, motions, or currents takes place in an uncontrolled way or without oversight, but they are all organized, and organization has become one of the fundamental elements of modern reality. At the beginning of the First World War the great talent of German organized life, Walter Rathenau, wrote: "Das ist eine Eigenschaft der Deutschen, dass da wo man ihn hinstellt, er mit seiner Aufgabe verwächst, und sein ganzes früheres Dasein vergisst." [One quality of the Germans is that where a person has advanced he grows closer to his duty and forgets his entire former being]. (After the Second World War it is possible to add: "eines jeden Europäers" [of every European] after "Deutschen" [Germans]). It is only the person who grows into his calling or mission to the extent that he does not have any distance from it—who never stops and reflects on anything, and in this way creates one symbiotic formation with it—that can suddenly and without any discernible transition be transformed into an "un-person," one who will conscientiously carry out any work or function with blind obedience.

The transit camp called Theresienstadt meant something different from a state of siege or a bivouac of soldiers within a town: the transit camp was an invention specific to the modern age. Such a camp functioned as a transfer point for human material; it was the interception point for a long transport, whose final destination was the crematorium. In this camp people gathered but never stayed, arrived in order to leave again. They were concentrated in one place in order to finally be dispersed in the air or on the ground as smoke and ashes. In these camps human material was accumulated and awaited further processing by the perfectly functioning technology. A quantity of this material

in the allotted amount was transported to a station in freight cars, just like cement, lumber, cattle—like any other goods.

The transport began with the order: "Alles mitnehmen!" [Take everything with you!]. In these two words an uncertain future is conjured up. It rarely meant release and a return home, and often meant being singled out for execution. Most of the time, however, these words meant to get ready to travel to yet another place of concentration. The camp was an expression of impermanence and of steady currents, of setting out on a journey and arriving from one. The place was not one for residing or settling, but only a way station for further roving—the senseless kind of always being on the road. Exchange, drivenness, lack of stability, constant motion, being driven in and driven away—these are expressions used by my deceased friend Emil Utitz in his noteworthy study to describe everyday life in the transit camp.[18] People were hustled, summoned, driven, and the ground was strewn with all kinds of different transports: soldiers, prisoners, fugitives, people leaving, people arriving, processions of death.

People are not only driven out of their homes by some external, foreign power, but for other reasons as well: their own discontent, diminished curiosity, an obsession with traveling no matter what, simply to relieve boredom and long intervals, and to do away with the feeling of homelessness and rootlessness, and by that existential uncertainty that the thinker called "das Unbehagen" [malaise].

Banishment and homelessness are not only categories concerning those who have been expelled, persecuted, or exiled. These categories also involve a majority of people—people who have lost their *center*, who have thus lost their true home and run from thing to thing, from one aimlessness to another, always in the vain hope that beauty and home are somewhere else.

CARIES

The essence of this age has been disclosed by a poet, who has given it a telling name: caries, or decay. The period concentrated on the year 1938 is an age of decay, and its time is decaying. It crushes spines and pushes them into the ground, does away with certainty and produces cowardice. Unfulfilled promises and crooked words become the order of the day. This age presents a time of skeletons and the horsemen of death, who ride across the land and leave behind them bloody tracks and mortal wounds. Decay reaches all the way to the pith, and eats to the marrow. It devours time and its essence, and transforms time into nontime, into the complete malice of the age. Decay eats up everything from the inside cunningly, in a conspiratorial way, in secret, unnoticed, until the entire structure suddenly breaks down and collapses. An organism (a nation, society, state) attacked by decay is no longer capable of

withstanding aggression. An age overtaken by decay is powerless against the onslaught of shamelessness, and is transformed into an age without shame.

What can be used to resist decay, and what kind of resistance will stop or curb its rapacity? What kind of deed can give a nation backbone in this era of decay? The time of decay robs. Does the poet not say the opposite, though? "This time of doubt and decay has given her (Prague) only beauty."[19] Does decay give beauty, distribute beauty, contribute beauty for a town? This time of decay does not distribute a thing, least of all beauty. The only thing that it can do is—in the form of a contrast and antithesis, as an enemy and a tempter—allow beauty to shine. The time of decay is a challenger and provacateur. A time stricken with decay is an age of provocation, and out of its deterioration and in its collapse it calls out for other times, for a time that is simply different.

A town that resists decay, and in its fight with decay appears to represent deliverance from it, is not merely an accumulation of people and dwellings. This town is an animate whole; it is made up of portals and towers, the music of Bach and Mozart, of chorales which preserve the memory of the nation, and of the commanding figure of a prince. "The prince balanced the lance." To know means to know the importance of things and their interrelationships. The person who knows weighs words and deeds, and only dares to act when he has weighed the meaning and the consequences of the action in advance. Courage consists of deliberation transformed into action. It is only the person who has weighed the relevance of freedom and who knows what freedom means that is capable of appreciating it and being worthy of it. To know means to recognize those conditions that are relevant and those that are not, to decide on some and reject others. As a mortal being, fallible and thrown back on his own experience, man must taste poverty and suffering in order to appreciate life. He must be afflicted with decaying time in order to long for a completely different time and understand what a full, fruitful, and impregnated time looks like. Because of this everything that had its origins in full time is conspicuous in the midst of decaying time, and as the fruit of full time it continues on and outlasts the decay. It is only in a time of decay that what it is to be a town and the true meaning of architecture are evident. Decay destroys and wastes everything that retains its nobility and rises to some stature. Because of this a spineless age is also an age without architecture.

The prince balanced his lance, weighed his weapons, and speculated as to whether he would be able to carry their weight. Two possibilities were laid on the scales of his deliberations: give up without a fight, not spill blood, not soil himself with violence, or, resist aggression and risk lives—his own and those of others. Who would balance his weapons in this way? A *historical* prince who rejects the sword, or a poet prince, born of *imagination* and exhorted by it to lead people to redemption in those fateful times when the real actors fail one after another and capitulate? To balance the lance is the same thing as to

weigh words. The person who weighs his words also knows how to determine the weight of weapons. He thus knows how these weapons might become too heavy to carry, and so only the exceptionally brave person undertakes to use them and to accept responsibility for them. Both princes—the historical prince and the imaginary one, this one and that one—converge into one mystical figure, the savior of the nation. This savior appears in two different and mutually exclusive forms, both of which are brought together in the name that does not differentiate between these forms and encompasses them both—Prince Václav [Wenceslas]. The nation can live through these times and save itself in the painful exaltation that continually gives it a difficult choice and a dangerous decision: to fight or to capitulate, to defend freedom or to give it up without a fight?

TRAGIC BEING

The town resists decay, but it is live people that enter into open battle with it, and who succumb to its overwhelming superiority. It is thus that in the disappearance of Central Europe a tragic being is born. This space is not only the cradle for that most comic of literary figures, Švejk, but also for the vivid beings of historical tragedy. So far, the tragic being does not have a name. There has not been a time yet when descendants recognized the tragic beings in living people of that era, beings that defied evil and perished in the conflict with it. In order for such a revealing act to take place, the living people of that time have to fall into oblivion and fade from the recollections of their contemporaries. It is only after this fading has occurred that historical memory can disclose the tragic nature of their lives and work. Recollections and memory part company, and then proceed in the opposite direction. Recollections gather without order or system of distinguishing between what is secondary and what is important, while historical memory finds out and preserves what is essential. Recollections speak of the dead in the form of a scattering of personal ideas, that he dressed in an eccentric way or in bad taste, walked with a cane or without a hat, borrowed money or was meticulously thrifty, etc. These details and bits of rubbish are associated with a person's work and deed, but do not constitute their foundation. Because of this discrepancy contemporaries are amazed to hear that this person or that, whom they knew well or less well as a normal person, could have been capable of unheard-of and abnormal exploits. These contemporaries also, with an equal lack of understanding, crown the ordinariness of the personality being described with their *own* idea of heroism, and thus stylize the person into a pose of the literary heroism of the time. Because the contemporaries are generally not aware of what is going on, or of the significance of their age, the figures appear to them to be deviating from the norm or eccentric, and it is only later that the historical imagination determines who they really were.

The tragic being has one eye too many ("ein Auge zuviel"). This exceptional clarity of vision distinguishes the tragic being from other people, and is a direct cause of his destruction. The person who has one eye too many does not only notice better what goes on around him, but also understands what he *must do* as a visionary, and what *action* he is bound to take. The tragic being judges the age and his own place in it with his eyes wide open, and with this clearsighted view becomes involved in situations where the only possible way out for him is to die.

It is not possible for the year 1938 to be reduced to some kind of time of preparation characterized exclusively by the events that followed, i.e., the war. The essence of that year is not found in the fact that it was the last year before the war. This very short period of time constitutes a privileged moment in history, when realities and events that before this moment—and later as well—were hidden and took place seemingly independently of one another suddenly erupt into the light of day. Whoever watched the European situation in 1938 with eyes wide open had to note both Munich and the Munich syndrome on the one hand, and the concentration camps and political trials in both dictatorships, and could not reconcile himself with either. While others closed their eyes to either Munich and Nazism or to Stalinism, the person who saw clearly comprehended them all together as evil, and could not make a pact with any of these phenomena. The visionary involved himself in precarious situations, and came into conflict not only with each of these three existing threats but also with a majority of people, who thought in terms of realism and were prepared in the fight against one threat to tolerate, engage in apologetics, or minimize the evil of another, different threat.

The person who has one eye too many comes under suspicion from those who shut their eyes to the threatening danger and do not want to get their fingers burned. Whoever currently criticizes versions of the Munich syndrome, concentration camps, and political trials raises suspicions on all sides. No one is comfortable with such a person, and he cannot please anyone. He becomes unwelcome, and is banished from influential circles. Even though he calls for community with his approach, for a union of free and reflective people, he is excommunicated everywhere that the politics of realism is practiced. Because he condemns both dictatorships, and because he makes no attempt to conceal his disdain for the Munich syndrome or the willingness to capitulate, it is only a question of time and conditions as to which of the countries that he criticizes condemns him morally, or which of the two totalitarian systems will send him to his death. There is nothing tragic in itself about death: death is the natural lot of man. Death only becomes tragic when it is the price that a person pays for having the courage to stand face-to-face against evil and not be daunted by its apparent omnipotence. The flash of liberation from all evil is present in such a death—whether accompanied by word or by silence.

REBIRTH

Can Central Europe recover from the catastrophe which it underwent in the years 1938–39 and following? Is the rebirth of Central Europe possible? Central Europe is an integral part of Europe, and it rises or falls with Europe. The threats to which Central Europe is exposed always encompass all of Europe. Central Europe lies between East and West, and spreads between Germany and Russia, but this defining term "between" does not relate only to space, but is also and primarily a matter of choice. Central Europe consists of a dispute between democracy on the one side and three forms of an undemocratic symbiosis—"Austrianism," "Prussianism," and Czarism—on the other. This "between" that defines Central Europe consists of a *decision* between uniformity and "Gleichschaltung" on the one hand, and variety and plurality on the other. It also constitutes a *choice*, however, between intolerance, squabbling, and dispersion on one side and the will to work together and the desire for unity and reconciliation.

When Palacký in his time expressed the thought that the progress of "electricity and steam" give the world a "new standard" he did not suspect that the basis of his findings was a question: would the reality of "electricity and steam," i.e., the advent of technology, science, and industry, represent a blessing or a curse for humanity? What is this "new standard," and what kind of space does it allow for people and nature, nations and culture, time and imagination? What is this standard that takes the measure of the modern age, and whose dimensions are authoritative? What kind of Europe will be born from this new standard, and what kind of time will this standard mete out? Palacký dreaded uniformity and sterile monotony, and regarded these phenomena as threats embodied by pan-Germanism and Czarism. Does this "new standard" which defines the appearance of the modern age not also conceal within itself the danger of "Gleichschaltung," uniformity, grayness? And will this unstoppable progress of "electricity and steam"—i.e., the convergence of technology, science, industry—not change into a new symbiosis, one that will enslave people and nature, history and culture, in a way even more drastic than the imperfect historical symbioses—i.e., "Prussianism," "Austrianism," and Czarism—were capable of?

Is not, therefore, the possibility that Central Europe will be reborn as a place where there is an ongoing discussion about the nature of European identity the same thing as the question as to how *all* of Europe will deal with this "new standard?" Does this "new standard" not also contain within it the threat that Europe, including its center, will become only a great caricature of European identity, because it succumbed to the all-encompassing power [die gleichschaltende Macht] of the new, modern *symbiosis*?

(1969)

Translated by James Satterwhite

Chapter 18

"TWO THOUSAND WORDS" AND HYSTERIA

When somebody yells "Fire!" in a crowded theater, horrified people rush to the exits, hysterically push, shove, stampede, and crush each other—ready to destroy themselves by their own behavior. This is called panic. If the building is really on fire, then he who yelled becomes a savior to those who managed to escape. However, what is his role if he yelled as a prank? He did not call attention to a danger, but engaged in provocation. Panic has been provoked, and its consequences will be equally serious whether there was a real danger or not.

General Kodaj's famous statement that "Two Thousand Words" is a counterrevolutionary challenge should be credited for demonstrating so clearly what political panic is, how it is created, and what its consequences may be.[1] By this proclamation, the general evoked a certain political atmosphere which captured not only the majority of our Parliament, but some political institutions as well. "Two Thousand Words" was then read under the influence of this atmosphere. The seriousness of this matter is much greater than that of an unsuccessful provocation. If we read the offending passage of this manifesto calmly and without prejudice we discover that it has this meaning: It is necessary to ask for the resignation of the people still in power who have compromised themselves by arbitrary decisions and violence, and who have ruined the national economy and devastated public property by their incompetence and irresponsibility. If they refuse to resign, then the citizens have the right to apply all available decent and humane means of public pressure to force their resignation.

The meaning of "Two Thousand Words" is thus clear: addressing the majority of our nation, it counsels them not to succumb to the blandishment and deception of the incompetent powers-that-be. Under what conditions can this lucid text be read differently? Under what conditions is it possible to describe it as a counterrevolutionary challenge? Under what conditions can

politicians read this text in this particular way, believe in it, and act accordingly? There is but one condition: the politicians take leave of their senses and better judgment, and become prisoners of political panic and hysteria. In this atmosphere everything appears in a different light, and the voices of reason and better judgment are silenced. People will believe anything in this kind of situation; with their very own eyes they will see warning signs in the sky, with their very own ears they will hear bells rung by angels. They will act in such a way that after a number of years have gone by they will find their own behavior unbelievable. What vulgar historians lack the most is the ability to describe the atmosphere of the times. Without this difficult but nonetheless necessary description it is almost impossible to grasp, for example, the trials of the Fifties or their reverberation in society.

In order for such trials to be held and such a reaction provoked in the general public it was necessary to make the society hysterical in advance. The general atmosphere had to be charged with an overt and a hidden hysteria. Th people had to live in a dim light of half-fear and half-hope, their fears and expectations so intertwined that they believed the unbelievable and also read texts in a way that suited the political manipulators and directors. Has anyone ever thought about the society we call Stalinist as a society where hysteria and its creation played an essential political role? Under different circumstances, General Kodaj only tried to repeat the well-known trick of the Fifties. His statement was an attempt to recreate an atmosphere of hysteria, in which everything is possible and which can be easily exploited by skilled politicians. General Kodaj is of course not a historical figure, and his action can be explained as an embarrassing echo of the past. How, though, did he manage to maneuver the president of the National Assembly into declaring that "Two Thousand Words" could have "tragic" consequences? We can derive a lesson from this incident: hysteria is not an innocent matter, but a very dangerous political weapon. A revolutionary politician is worthy of his calling if he can keep his head and better judgment even in this kind of atmosphere, if he does not allow himself to be provoked, if he finds the time to analyze the situation and is able to rout the panic-making provocateur.

(August 1968)

Translated by Zdenka Brodska and Mary Hrabik Samal

Chapter 19

ON LAUGHTER
(In Memory of František Červinka)

Discussion in the Editorial Office of *Plamen* on 5 June 1969, in which the following persons participated: František Červinka, Iva Janžurová, Miloš Kopecký, Milan Morávek, Ivan Vyskočil. The discussion was entitled: "Laughter and the Liberation." It was led by the unforgettable František Červinka, who opened with the sentence ". . . humor is a very important matter and an important problem." The record of this discussion was never published due to the fact that the publication of *Plamen* was forbidden soon after that. During a search of my house in 1972, agents of State Security showed some interest in the stenographic record of this dialog. When asked whether the regime was afraid of laughter, the commander of the assault team laughed, and then entered the sheaf of stenographed materials—entitled "Laughter and Liberation"—into the log of confiscated materials as item number A27. In April 1991 I drew this essay to the attention of the newspaper *Literární noviny* (I am on their editorial board), but the editor-in-chief turned it down, with the concurrence of "a majority of the editorial board," because it did not grow out of "the spirit of the times." Such are the adventures and the comic fate of this old conversation about laughter.

May 1, 1991—Karel Kosík

I

Is not the most admirable thing about laughter the fact that people laugh and are able to laugh in very different ways, without knowing or needing to know what laughter is, while laughter passes by everyone who thinks about laughter and who inquires as to its essential quality? That would indicate that laughter is related to language. After all, people talk about the widest possible variety of subjects and enjoy talking, and they are not hampered in the least by the fact that they do not know the definition of a phrase or are unaware of the philologists' and philosophers' disputes. The connection between speech and

laughter is in fact deeper that it would seem at first glance. Only a being gifted with language is also able to laugh, and speech and laughter are not appendages to human existence, but are its constituent parts.

The person who would understand the essence of laughter must give up the idea that somehow the interrelationship of muscles, opened mouths, voices, and loudness is involved. Laughter also does not mean that a person has to become merry and bright. The essence of laughter is in the *state of mind.* The Czech word for mind [mysl] points to thought and cogitation, but its basic meaning is close to the German "Gemüt" and the Greek "psyche," as is indicated by expressions such as: "be in good spirits," "don't lose heart," "freethinking," etc. The Czech democrats of the first half of the nineteenth century were jubilant when they discovered a gem among proverbs which seemed to confirm their idea that ordinary people also engage in philosophy: "The human mind—hell and heaven." Since laughter comes from the mind, every state of mind creates its own particular laughter. We can differeniate between a good-natured laugh, a malicious laugh, and one full of guile; we can also tell if a laugh is affable or cruel, natural or affected, etc.

What a person has in mind, and what is in the mind and sprouts and ripens there, need not be synonymous with how it is expressed on the face. The face and the mind exist differently, and it is thus possible that an angry mind can seem kind, just as a sad mind can conceal its sorrow under a "light smile." In laughter and with laughter a person can get rid of his stiffness and uneasiness, and open up his surroundings and himself. Laughter means to free oneself, and both elements of corporeality by means of which the mind is inscribed on the face, eyes and lips give these tolerated freedoms form and provide a model for them. In some types of laughter relaxation exceeds all limits, and interferes with all precautions. Then we can witness unsuitable, improper, offensive, and even cruel laughter. Laughter frees one up, and rigidity, or even only ordinary seriousness, gradually gives way to gentle laughter. Alternatively, it can suddenly break into an explosion of uncontrolled, wild laughter.

Laughter is precious and exceptional. Whoever laughs all the time and at everything, at inappropriate times and in improper places, displays not only superficiality but also the imbalance of his own mind: he is flighty.

II

Witty reason (der Witz) does not tell jokes or funny stories, but rather involves a keen readiness of mind or receptivity which is aware of what is going on and can behave accordingly. Wittiness is readiness of mind multiplied. This receptivity does not put together individual perceptions and impressions into a comprehensive picture, but rather recognizes at once and in one action what the issue is. Because of this it is able to act in time. Witty reason is not some cold calculation without humor; it is an open receptivity and sparkling that perceives

the connections with that which seems to be distant and apparently alien. Instead, with one slice—with a cut or a joke—it separates out what chance and external appearance have put next to each other. Wittiness is different from joking and playing jokes. These activities are only an imitation of what has already been said and disclosed, and merely accompany a superficial and vain brilliance. Witty reason is adroit, and knows how to work out from implications what is really going on. The essence of this heightened receptivity is *imagination*, which merges related items into one whole and severs off tangled and accidental growths. Laughter is both symbol and symbolism; it has a preference for brevity, consistency, and the surprising. It eliminates any kind of tediousness, garrulousness, and verbosity.

Wittiness as a sparking receptivity forms the basis for social laughter. In this laughter is born a society of people who acknowledge each other, who do not laugh *at* each other but laugh together at their own ridiculousness, at their ability to make others laugh and to evoke a storm of laughter. (The clear-sighted and fearless Prometheus had a sense of humor and laughed, while his clumsy brother was deprived of this gift.)

Social laughter discloses what is unreasonable: whoever puts himself forward and tries to be above others, who in his actions and behavior and speech goes beyond moderation and exaggerates, is hurled down with laughter to his proper place. Those who take part in social laughter assure themselves of their own fallibility, finality, mortality—and thus of their own ridiculousness. They also assure themselves of their own dignity and equality, of their inalienable humanity. This laughter is a duel and a joust, where there is an unwritten rule that only one who knows how to reply to derision, insinuations and belittlement with ready wittiness will remain in the game, and the game continue. The game is spoiled by the person who cannot keep up with the increasing tempo of verbal fencing, who falls behind and falls out of the ring. It is also spoiled by the person who runs out of witty replies and instead resorts to vulgarity or insults in his weakness. To play the trump of plays on words and invectives does away with any kind of subordination or superiority among those playing the game; it levels differences in status, in education, and in age. The spirit—the ancestor of laughter—is concrete, and exists only as the encounter and sparking of spirits: a lack of spirit is monopolistic and dull. It does not give out any sparks, and produces only ennui and pain. In teasing and in nettling sparks fly, and one witty reply overtakes and surmounts another. It is in this mutual laughter that an atmosphere of closeness and trust is created, where any offense or offensiveness is far removed. Whoever is offended by a quick word but does not fall to the ground like one defeated, but instead laughs along with everyone else, immediately deflects the attack and attacks the other. Such laughter liberates people from abandonment and loneliness, and returns a sense of belonging to them—or, perhaps even creates such a sense. Through common laughter a person emancipates himself from the closed egotistical "I," looking

only at himself and concentrating only on his own advantage. Then, along with others, he enters into a community of those who are equally fallible, but who are equally noble and free.

In addition to this common, social laughter, there is also of course a false, artificial, fawning kind of laughter—the kind of laughter with which courtiers and subjects are compelled to respond to the joking of the lords, thus showing their obedience.

III

In his *History of the French Revolution* Thomas Carlyle describes a scene from the year 1789, when the people break with the old regime—with laughter. The procession of Parisians launched the revolution by making the king look ridiculous. It was an unrepeatable spectacle—"it was the only limitless, unarticulated 'ha ha', a global laughter that extended over the whole world, one that can only be compared to the old Saturnalia." In the same way, in 1968 the people of Prague bid farewell to the old order with laughter. In public meetings where youth predominates, salvos of laughter erupt and speakers vie with joking, and the greater the gales of laughter evoked in the public, the more people become involved in political action. In these exciting times it seems like politics have been transformed into the art of making the public laugh.

Laughter is, of course, an integral part of politics: it is one of the ways of "destroying one's opponent (the sophist Gorgiás)," of belittling him, of reducing him to dubious circumstances and embarrassing him. In the end it can disable him as a public factor and eliminate him from play. This laughter also has its limits, though, and if it goes beyond these bounds it becomes ludicrous itself—that is, it becomes childish and naive. Laughter is not all-powerful even in politics, and if it persuades itself that it can change conditions on its own it will succumb to a lie.

History is ironic and treacherous: nothing is decided in advance, once and for all. One way that the old system becomes extinct is by being forced to give way, by falling apart internally so that it becomes ridiculous by virtue of its own shakiness and uncertainty, whereupon the people's laughter magnifies this weakness. An outmoded system also departs from the scene in another way, however. It can resist giving way until the last possible moment and remain defiant, not renouncing force and violence, and break down into massacres in which the innocent and defenseless also fall through the trap door. There is yet another kind of departure, where the people's laughter meets up with the ironic derisiveness of history. The ridiculous regime gives way, but does not give up, and history acts like a hidden encounter between the public laughter of people and the hidden grimace of those who are retreating, but who dream of revenge,

of returning to a time when the laughter of the laughing crowds would go away.

What kind of laughter did the people have in the Spring of 1968? And what kind of people was it that was laughing? The people laughed as if they had recalled the origins of their own name, and showed in their actions that the people are human. The people laughed at the compromised rulers, but they did not do them any harm; it simply never occurred to the people to pay the rulers back in kind. This people laughed, and in its laughter it was magnanimous; its laugh was the laugh of a magnanimous people.

The revolutionary attempt of 1968 thus linked up with the inexhaustible potential of the magnanimous democracy and democratic magnaminity of the nineteenth century, when the experience of oppression, humiliation, and criminality lived through by people then was perceived—as well as submitted to and referred to—with humor. The experience of persecution and prison, as conveyed in two outstanding works of Czech literature—"Tyrolské elegie" [Tyrol Elegies] (1852) and "Oživené hroby" [Revived Graves] (1863)—represents a special kind of experience.[1] Oppression was unbearable, but it did not go to extremes, and thus it allowed for the possibility of humor. In the same way, prison and exile provided a space—though small and limited—for humanity. In this way it also made room for humor, while other conditions simply did not allow for this possibility. In Dostoevsky's *House of the Dead* there is no place for humor; there a battle to the death is going on, without compassion or mercy. Authors so different and antithetical to each other—both talented, one a real man and character, the other an authentic radical and later an unprincipled police informer—portrayed an Austrian jail. This was a jail tempered with a dose of tolerance, something unheard-of in Czarist Russia.

Laughter and humor represent a harmonization of mind in that they clean out of themselves, repudiate as ridiculous and not worthy of themselves, all that is false, deformed, or that perpetrates wrong. It is thus in permanent conflict with the unsuccessful foursome of malice—with the malicious quartet of envy, hate, suspicion, and imperious surveillance. Such a humorous state of mind forfeits trust, and is overtaken by baseness. This baseness stops at nothing, and does not shrink from any means to its end. Laughter and humor have an irreparable tendency to underestimate evil; they tend to lose sight of the fact that evil is evil and malicious, that evil lurks and bides its time, conspires, and prepares its vendetta.

Those temporarily defeated are secretly organizing their reprisal against the joyful and jubilant laughter of a public drunk on the promise of freedom. Together they raise hopes that the person who laughs last indeed laughs best. The Prague Spring of 1968 was like this, viewed at a depth that breaks through superficiality. It was a historical *conflict* between open and trusting laughter and the hidden spitefulness and secret sneers of those who were preparing their

revenge. Against the public laughter of the people one has the cunning grimaces of the conspirators.

It would seem that the unhappy date of August 21 [1968] confirms that the laughing, trusting people will succumb—as it has so many times before—to a well-organized minority. This minority lacks a sense of humor, and is obsessed with the desire to rule, and it would thus seem that the cunning of the conspirators will have the last laugh. This conclusion, however, is premature. Malice can force the laughing people to tears, but it will not have the last laugh because it *does not know how to laugh.* Malice suppresses and cripples laughter, so the victory of conspiratorial malice over laughter would mean the end of any kind of laughter. No one would then laugh any more. The return of the conspirators to power announces that laughter is done for—for the time being? Forever?

IV

Malice is a caricature and falsification of laughter. It is a perverted, unjust laughter. Antilaughter appears in the guise of laughter.

What is malicious laughter?

It was malice when to pass the time concentration-camp guards singled out a prisoner, bound him hand and foot, ordered him to escape, and then laughed at his total powerlessness.

It was malice when Moravec, a minister in the government of the [World-War-II German] Protectorate, repeated his favorite sentence that Marx was a learned Jew who to the end of his life was unable to tell his left hand from his right without the help of a scholarly dictionary.

It was malice when Procurator Vyshinsky announced at a Moscow tribunal: "You, defendant Bukharin, are half fox and half swine."[2]

It was malice when Secretary Zhdanov stated in front of gathered writers that a great Russian poetess was "half slut, half nun."

Malice is an act where people are divided with one blow into arrogant judges, in whose eyes the noose is already there lurking, and humiliated victims, in whose sight the horror of extinction has already halfway taken hold. Malice is a word or deed that transforms people into hunted animals and a humiliated rabble. In malice and from malice it is possible to hear the sound of a whip falling on a person (body and soul). In malice a person is degraded to the level of a thing, to a mere something that the keepers address disdainfully with the worst possible insult: "du mensch." In malice this "something" must be subordinated in order for "someone" (lord, [party] secretary, inquisitor, bureaucrat) to be elevated in their own eyes and in the opinion of the watching public.

In malice three types of laughter come together. The first is the quiet or loud laughter of an "originator" (author) who is self-satisfied with his own wittiness, drunk with his provocative superiority, and marvels appreciatively at his own brilliance and ability to "be ironical." This is the smile of self-confident victory. The second is derision, which, like a poisonous arrow that has been let loose, strikes its victim and pins it to the ground. In so doing it creates a relationship between the originator and the object like that between the archer and the live target, the hammer and anvil, or the hunter and his prey. In contrast to the elevating and liberating shared laughter, derisive malice divides people into irreconcilable differences. Yet another kind of laughter is that of the public that is called upon to watch a show and through its reception ("animation in the hall," "laughter," "a round of applause") gave the truth to the winner and kept the victim in a complete impasse. In contrast to this "public"—the third figure involved in the game of malice—which amuses itself, has a good time, and is not surprised at anything, the viewer who is late or who is looking on from a distance is horrified and does not smile at all at this orchestrated show. He simply asks uncomprehendingly how something like this is at all possible.

V

Humor watches over a person like a guardian angel and keeps him from falling into despair or into impudence. It also keeps him from sinking into pitiful whining, or feeling that he has been wronged. Humor casts into doubt and brings into the open four kinds of false vision, and the same number of damaging approaches:

(1) Disparagement, conceit and an aristocratic superiority. Humor then personifies a radical democratic character.

(2) Suspicion, anger and hate. Humor thus protects bountiful joy and merriment against spite and envy from below (and thus from every mob).

(3) Supervision, guardianship, spying. In this ridiculing of *all* jailers, managers and disciplinarians is found the meaning of justice and liberality.

(4) Obsession of any kind—with wealth, power, fame, faith or resolve. Humor thus works against fanaticism of proprietorship and possessiveness as the liberating and extravagantly generous power of a freeing insight and range of vision.

The absence of humor is alarming. What is being declared where there is no humor, or not enough of it? The absence of humor proclaims the loss of

something essential: a person without humor lacks something vital and suffers from this loss. He is not cheated out of something insignificant or incidental, but is actually missing something quite important. If humor—like laughter—means to "know better," as Vladislav Vancura said in 1930 and in 1937, then this means that historical periods or societies without humor are afflicted with untruth at the very foundations of their knowledge; their knowledge lacks something essential. Where there is no humor it is not a question of a mere lapse, mistake, or oversight, but rather open untruth. Humor is not a collection of information or knowledge (of stories and anecdotes); it is the manifestation of the highest imagination. There is something out of order, discordant, not in harmony in the solitary edifice of human existence if humor has been lost. The absence of humor means that the internal order—that tuning which attunes man to harmony with that which exists—has been replaced by an external order. The absence of humor leaves an emptiness that is filled by a surrogate, an imitation, or by depression. The vacated space is then occupied by cunning, guile, wise-cracking, and joviality. Just as the collapse of some architecture signifies something more important than the mere facts of ugly buildings falling apart, or the decay of language expresses something more basic than the mere fact of the rule of empty phrases and worn-out words, the absence of humor does not only mean that happiness has passed people by. In all of these cases what comes to the surface is evil making everything worthless.

VI

In order to defend the master's teachings, a Czech reviewer of Bergson in 1966 had to eliminate all forms of laughter that did not have the character of derision or rationality, but through this uncritical servitude he succeeded only in emphasizing and laying bare the weakness of the entire conception. It is a mistake to link laughter only with what is comic or equate it with ridicule. A mother's smile is also a form of laughter—after all, she is not ridiculing the child, nor does she see the child as a ridiculous object. Her glowing face shows clearly her liking and affection for the child. The laughter which is brought out in us by human and animal young ones is an expression of joy at the inexhaustible vitality of this awakening life as it experiments with its surroundings. Even the earth smiles; it is only that nature which has been reduced to the source of raw materials and is plundered without love which has lost its laughter.

Laughter is the state of mind which is reflected in corporeality—in the spiritualized corporeality or the corporeal spirituality of that human organ where corporeality and the spirit are one: in the eye. A smile is the action in unison of the eyes and the mouth.

The mother smiles at the child, and her smile belongs only to that child. With this smile two human beings enter into a dialogue, and the smile is the

external indicator and bond of this understanding. This closeness is distinguished by the smile, and this relationship is differentiated in this way from all others and from the entire surroundings.

In contrast to this kind of smile, the smile in "keep smiling" belongs to everyone indiscriminately. It is for this reason that everyone can feel flattered by a film star's smile, which seems to be exhibited for everyone and to all, and everyone can say to himself: "her look is meant for me." This kind of smile, the smile of a boxer or of a politician in front of a camera, belongs to anyone and everyone and is thus not addressed concretely to anyone in particular. This smile is addressed to everyone, as long as they are reduced to anonymity, to interchangeable shadows and nobodies. "Keep smiling" is the laughter of an era in which show suppresses veracity, appearance conquers reality, the character played is more important than the person, and the mask and function are more important than one's humanity. "Keep smiling" is the laughter of an inverted age, one in which subjects are transformed into recipients and carried into a fictive region, into a castle of phantasms and illusions in the sky. The person who puts on this smile of "keep smiling" thinks that he is the center of the universe, and believes that with this conventional mimicry he is spreading laughter and becoming a powerful magician under whose gaze "the whole world is laughing." Everyone who watches him is meant to feel honored by this artificial smile, and lulled into the illusion that this smile belongs to him and to him alone. In reality, however, this smile is meant for everyone and no one; it transforms them all into a progression of identical things without meaning.

"Keep smiling" represents the victory of convention over thought and thoughtfulness. "Keep smiling" means: smile, for that is what custom and the pressure of public opinion demand. "Keep smiling" is brought about by an external force; the person is subordinated to it, for he knows that to laugh at this demand and regard it with humor would mean social suicide. The public official who does not put on this required, ritualized smile is giving up his career and preparing his own downfall.

"Keep smiling" is the laugh of the crowds, and of the anonymous public that has lost any understanding of the secret smile of the Mona Lisa. They are powerless before her smile, and don't know what to do with it (value it, imitate it, ignore it, condemn it?). In the same blind way they take the smiling face of the mother leaning over the child to be a meaningless private matter.

But what is this enigmatic smile? This smile does not laugh at nor make fun of anyone. It is not intended for a particular person or being, but is universal. It embraces everything and concerns everything that exists: it reflects everything that is, as the duality of joy and sorrow, nearness and distance, life and death, the overt and the secret. The enigmatic laugh is not painful, still less is it plaintive, but it knows the meaning of pain. It is neither effervescent nor joyful, but knows what joy is. The enigmatic character of this

laugh is not in some tendency to hide something or hush it up, that it is aware of some secret that it doesn't want to divulge. This smile is enigmatic precisely because it expresses the hidden connection between pain and joy, the far and the near, the longing for life and the unavoidability of extinction.

This secret smile is not evil, but by the same token it is not naively full of goodwill either. In Mona Lisa's face there is neither the warm kindness of the Naumburg Regelindis nor the provocative imperiousness of Uta. In this enigmatic smile the lips are not unyielding or tightly closed, but neither are they fully open or ajar. A hint of relaxation is etched on the lips, but they remain closed and even reserved. The onset of their relaxation spills over onto the entire face and models it as a smiling relaxation, as the secret of the smile. The enigmatic smile is closer to thoughtfulness than to frivolousness, and is more akin to courage and restraint than to faint-heartedness or despair. But this enigmatic smile is the exact opposite of that wild laughter with mouth wide open: the Latin "fatuus"—with open mouth, wide-open, which also denotes simplemindedness, preposterousness, ineptness.

In the Christian tradition Jesus and laughter have been mutually exclusive. Thomas More maintained that the Saviour could never laugh, but by this he meant noisy, uproarious laughter, the kind that borders on the inappropriate. When Jesus meets the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky he smiles, but smiles a gentle, scarcely noticeable smile which understands everything and forgives all. He smiles an *enigmatic* smile.

VII

This is an era in which indifference has merged with fanaticism, timid withdrawal with brazen aggression, where everything merges and flows in one unstoppable process that eliminates certainty, boundaries, limits, and where the slogan of the day is unlimited growth. It is the age that has torn many things out of their traditional places and either flung them up or thrown them down, an age of uninterrupted change, transformation, and confusion. This epoch has also mixed up and altered the usual positions of laughter and seriousness, and inverted their normal relation to each other. This means, however, that over time this era has moved and disrupted the previous chronological structure, shaken deeply rooted ideas, and, what is even more significant, shaken all of the previous forms and ways that different times had of communicating with and encountering each other. Time reserved for sorrow used to be strictly separated from a time of joy and celebration. The modern age has shaken things up and torn them—things, customs, people, values—from their usual places and given them different locations. Places are occupied by strange things and people, and people and things are overcome by an obsession to seize for themselves places and times that do not belong to them, that are not their own places and times. In this general confusion laughter also

appears at the wrong time or in an inappropriate place. People laugh at times and in places where they should be mourning, or are moved and cry even though they could laugh sincerely and freely.

All measure has been wasted and dissipated, everything has been exchanged, interchanged, and confused, and places inhabited by things and people are either suddenly or gradually and stealthily occupied by something completely different. Things that have for so long appeared in a certain form are suddenly presented in a completely different, unusual, and seemingly new way. *Czarism*, perfected and modernized of course, passes itself off as the vanguard of the world *proletariat*; the once-again resurrected *German* paganism presents itself to the world as the only legitimate heir of the *Greece* of Heraclitus and Sophocles.

The particular style of this era, however, is not in what is transparent and evident to everyone sooner or later. What is characteristic of our age is the attitude that laughs at the new czarism or the Führer's hysteria, regards itself as being above both of them, but does not realize that these phenomena that are ridiculous, derided, and worthy of scorn are built into the very substance of the era. Because this attitude does not comprehend this substance, it rejects its manifestation as a foreign body. The grotesque perversity of the historical forms and phenomena of this era is found in the upheaval of the foundations, and thus also in the confusion of historicity with mere history.

Both laughter and sorrow, mirth and grief, are torn from their places, shifted and flung elsewhere, and cast into other circumstances. In the process they lose their own time, they are not in the right place, and they come and reveal themselves at the wrong time. There is a time for weeping and a time for joy, a time for work and a time for rest, a time for sleep and a time for waking. In the inverted conditions, however, in this derailed era, the times get mixed up and penetrate each other. Suddenly and without warning laughter's place is taken by dread and horror, and in a flash laughter changes into shivering and paralysis. Admiring wonderment and veneration suddenly degenerate, every kind of greatness and glory is turned into ash, changes into rags or broken stones, and only a bitter sneer and unhappy laugh remain.

When differentiation and boundaries are abolished a one-dimensionality results, one in which joy is not separated from sorrow, but where both merge into something indefinite. Night and day become indistinguishable, and both turn grey. The end result of all this is boredom and worry.

The petty and the incidental each flies upward and claims for itself sovereign standing: the adjective laughs at the noun. Science is science, but whenever the adjective "aryan" or "proletariat" is attached to this noun science stops being science in and of itself, and turns into nonscience. Justice is justice, law is law, but "Volksgericht" [Nazi "People's Court"—ed.] is a derision of law and justice. That which was meant to strengthen the substance

as an ally turns against the substance as an enemy, eats out the substance, and replaces it with appearance, into a shell without a center.

Where in the past the emptiness and majesty of nature was embodied in its final and limited creature (nature was in this creature) something grotesque came into being: the sanctity and untouchability of a cow, the sanctity and untouchability of an ape. The modern era has its own forms of the grotesque though. If human power is transformed into gold and money, or into barbed wire, and both are untouchable, protected by force and by law, and both—money and barbed wire—are guaranteed privileged spots at the top, evoking fear and respect, then the grotesque enters into the center of events as lord and victor. "Keep smiling" is also a manifestation of this grotesque—"keep smiling" in the form of the obligatory smile, like a tribute paid with a convention, as the forced tipping of the hat and greetings by the willows, so that the person can insinuate himself into public favor and not lose public renown. The grotesque is conjured up in this smile, in this caricature of smiling, in this artificiality and affectation of laughter. The person fabricates laughter, behaves like the maker of artificial laughter: he exhibits a dental plate. The affected smile and the dental plate go together; they are the decoration and the gem of modern man, who has sunk to being a mere character. In this degradation people do not smile at each other, but rather grimace at each other and show off to each other the most varied kinds of artificial teeth displayed for show. The inversion of this era is reflected in the artificial smile of manufactured prostheses as in a mirror; it is not people who smile friendly smiles at each other now, but rather it is ready-made products that flash their teeth competitively against each other.

VIII

Is it the philosopher's lot to be ridiculous? When does a philosopher become ridiculous? This happens when he is so busy looking at the stars that he ignores the earth and falls into a hole, when in a society that is laughing he keeps a stiff dignity and puts on an air of solemnity. In both cases he falls into untruth because he forgets that being is concrete. The observation of the distant heavenly bodies cannot ignore the earth's gravity, and reality is not only serious. It is also humorous, ridiculous, and sometimes also evokes joyful laughter.

When does the philosopher fall into a hole? He falls into a hole when he is not faithful to his calling (vocation) and falls under the sway—temporarily or permanently—of some ideology that takes him away from this calling. It is then that the philosopher is wrong, fatally so; he ceases to be himself at this point, and is transformed into something else entirely: one who promotes false consciousness.

The fall into the hole by itself is not funny, and we may suppose that a Thracian girl who laughs when she sees the philosopher tottering over the hole means no harm by her laugh. She is not laughing an evil laugh. The philosopher only becomes ridiculous, even painfully so, the minute he claims that he did not fall at all, that he was really flying. He becomes ridiculous when he explains away his mistake by saying that it really represented the truth of history. He accuses the girl who laughed of not knowing what she was laughing about; since her horizons are limited to everyday concerns, she could not possibly understand the profundity and depth of the philosopher's *motion.*

The Thracian girl was being frank and witty, and she knew that at her age mirth was more becoming than pessimism. On the other hand, as he was falling the philosopher overlooked the fact that in her laugh the "negation" of inattention and indifference was achieved. If when falling he had burst out laughing in response to the passing girl's laughter an entirely new situation would have arisen. Two people would have been laughing together at his mistake and at his stumbling. To err is human. This humanity is not diminished, but is rather enhanced when a person is able to laugh at his own mistakes.

Heidegger is also right though as he weighs the magnitude of the philosopher's fall: for him the laughing girl is only a little girl, a common example of ordinary life ("ein Durchschnittsmensch"). No one is protected from the pitfalls of life, and everyone is exposed to the danger of falling into the abyss and dropping to the bottom. The philosopher can maintain his dignity even while falling, as long as he is faithful to himself and thinks about his fall. After this, the experience of his own breakdown is also the experience of thought that is enriched and that admits what the fall really is. The real question, however, is whether this experience of failure, debacle, error, and defeat will become part of the experience of thought, or whether thought will reject this reality as someone else's concern, shut itself up in itself, in ideas without experience. Can philosophy spare itself the pain of error, or is it so connected with a person's humanity that it has to go through the bitterness of failure, catastrophe, and untruth—as everyone must—so that it can think about what is happening in the world and about what being is?

If the philosopher does not abandon his critical faculties, that is, his thoughtfulness, he does not fall into a hole, but rather into a well. This well is a well of enlightemnent, and drops of living water fall on the philosopher as he falls. Out of the experience of the fall, decline, and failure in his thinking the philosopher understands the liberating nature of laughter, and can now laugh along with the others and be of good cheer (Nietzsche laughed, but he laughed alone). The glory and greatness of Europe is found in the fact that it thinks and does not lose its sense of humor, engages in philosophy and can still laugh at itself.

The idea that laughter keeps us from falling denigrates laughter and misses

its relevance. People will always, now and in the future, fall into error and mystification, stray from the true path. Laughter, however, makes it possible to examine what goes on in the world, and it is this feature that constitutes its irreplaceable importance. The world is—in spite of all horrors, man's fallibility, and the ugliness in the world—singularly beautiful.

IX

Speech also laughs; it laughs at the reality that puts on airs and puffs itself up to the breaking point. Speech is then that inconsequential little thing, that mere pin, that with one touch destroys the swelled head, the empty posturing and pompousness. Speech has so much feeling and perceptivity that its critical spirit and its never-failing vigilant thought immediately recognize and with one stroke separate pretense from truth.

If I were to say that the nation is divided into those who belong to a political party and those who do not, I can ascertain the factual nature of that statement, and to a certain extent can also reveal something about the nature of the political system. On the other hand, the sentence "the nation is divided into those in the party or who are not party members" (see in this connection my essay, "Our Present Crisis," Part One) shows the grotesqueness of the entire system. Speech itself ridicules untruth (the pseudoconcrete), and laughs at this inversion of truth. A particle (pars) pretends to be the whole; it appears in the guise of wholeness, and so with every step it takes and with its every action it generates and produces, initiates and introduces, turmoil and confusion—and thus untruth. Singly and in part it attempts to get a monopoly on the whole, that is, over all of reality. Partiality is transformed into an expanding and commanding inquisitiveness. The whole, reality, is concrete, not some empty or depleted whole. The rule of the party and the party spirit over the whole means the domination of abstraction over concreteness, and perceptive speech ridicules this swindle.

Whoever listens carefully to speech will hear her laughter. Speech does not tolerate stupidity and ridicules it. Speech does not have a liking for insolence, and makes it look ridiculous. When he was listening carefully to the word "Rakousko" (Austria, Österreich), Karel Havlíček heard two ridiculing phrases, that precisely denoted the reactionary tendencies of the Habsburg monarchy: the first was "rak" [crab], which crawls backwards, while the second was "ouzkost" [anxiety], as the feeling of unfreedom inside of such a system. If Havlíček had been writing in French he would have heard in the word "l'Autriche" an analogous symbolism: "ostrich" (l'autruche), and perhaps even deception (tricher).

The enormous integrative power of the Russian language is seen in its ability to take in foreign words into its basic store and treat them as its own.

The spirit of the language is not shocked by expressions such as: parikmakherskaya [hairdresser's], buterbrot [sandwich], platzdarm [beachhead], but uses them confidently all the time as brand-new Russian expressions. The Czech language would not bear the weight or load of such words. It would burst with laughter if it tried to incorporate such phrases into its vocabulary as normal words. In order for Czech to take in foreign words it has to put them through a short, or sometimes lengthy, process. It must transform them, and quite often it rids them of their original meaning and changes them in such a way that they conform to *its* spirit. This spirit is very important for humor and wittiness. The tongue must play with these foreign words that have been taken into the language, and in this playing it demonstrates its ability to jest. The tongue gets a child's innocent pleasure from the juggling tricks that it can do on its own, from the way in which it knows how to play with everything which belongs to it as speech—intonation, rhythm, pronunciation, grammar—and it is in its element when it plays like this and laughs on its own account, not someone else's.

It would seem that the power of imagination in speech has taken the place of and balanced out the powerlessness of the people, as if the imagination in speech dared to engage in a victorious struggle where real politics had failed and been defeated.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Czech was a language of servants and stable-boys, of craftsmen, of hard-headed farmers in the countryside and simple working people in the towns. It was a language in disfavor, held in contempt, a homely language of the common folk. The language was powerless, disfigured, and sullied, apparently unable to express anything at all that was of a higher nature or more elevated. And behold: this language that was defiled, ridiculed, excluded from (higher) society and from cultural life came up from below, and as if by a miracle developed in itself an unbelievable power to turn the situation around and reverse it. Everything in it that had been denigrated and not taken seriously, excommunicated, now bears interest through this one act of genius alone. Even though the language was full of Germanisms and was a linguistic patchwork it managed to turn this weakness into something useful, or even into an advantage. Not only does it not give in to the onslaught of the colonizers, occupiers, or oppressors, but manages to play a winning hand with them by making them seem ridiculous. In this way Czech has become one of the richest languages as far as the vocabulary is concerned. In a wide realm of reality it has two expressions for things. One expression has Czech roots, and is the one used normally and regularly to describe or designate things. The second expression, on the other hand, the foreign word taken into the language, places things in a sarcastic, ridiculous and degrading light.

Pavel Eisner collected many such pairs and doubles.[3] The language plays with these foreign words that it has incorporated; it gets inordinate pleasure from being able to strip them of their pathos, conceit, and great-power superiority and instead assign them to a subordinate and debased position. It thus delivers the verdict of justice over those who have the physical power to destroy the nation. The oppressed nation is as a matter of actual fact in a weaker position with regard to its oppressor, but the language reverses this situation and changes it. The Czech language raises the nation from powerlessness to the heights, and by the magical power of the word carries out a liberating transformation. The defiler, occupier, and colonizer all become ridiculous: the commissioned officer [důstojnik] becomes merely "officer" [oficír], the sovereign [mocnár] becomes "potentate" [potentát], political party [strana] is simply "party" [partaj], and a functionary [příslušník] of the State Secret Police (geheime Staatspolizei) turns into "the Gestapo guy" [gestapák].

The person who wrongfully and outside of the law elevates himself is brought down and put where he belongs; the place that he deserves is assigned to him: "Jedem das Seine" [to everyone that which is his]. This never takes the form of "paying back" or revenge, but rather of justice. Whoever destroys limits, i.e., justice, is hauled into court by the seemingly powerless language. It calls this person to accountability and sentences him to the highest test: it assigns him to his proper place with ridicule and laughter.

(1969)

Translated by James Satterwhite

Chapter 20

HAVLÍČEK'S PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY

Havlíček's concept of democracy is not a compilation of personal convictions, but rather a way of life. To be a democrat is a mode of human existence, not only of political convictions or positions on this or that issue. Havlíček made mistakes in politics and in judging people, but never stopped being a democrat. Democracy is a way of life with which man lives. With this cumbersome expression, the greatness and profound nature of what Havlíček established should be stressed. In this view of democracy, there are three indivisible components: manliness, sobriety and clarity, and humor.

As any man of the nineteenth century, Havlíček lived with the belief that everything had its own internal limits which could not be exceeded without it canceling its own existence. Therefore, the progressive myth of the *Moderna* movement was foreign to him.[1] The *Moderna* believed in the incessant transgression and tearing down of any and all boundaries. A man is characterized by his manliness, as his own measure, and a woman by her femininity. This is why there cannot be, in Havlíček's world, the monsters which have already inundated the twentieth century—a feminine and weak man, and a masculine woman deprived of grace. Manliness is incompatible with bragging and empty pomposity. How many people since Havlíček's time have gotten into a fight where they lasted through the first and second rounds, when there was nothing much to lose and then, when the real fight started, did not have enough strength and real manliness and so failed and gave up? Manliness means enduring the critical moment when everything is on the line (but also the vision to see that everything is on the line, and that in the event of a loss there will be far-reaching consequences). It is only at this level that the difference appears between boasting and empty gestures and the manliness of real deeds. Manliness is more than simple audacity or a naive and unforeseen willingness "to do it." Havlíček's manliness is the reliability and honesty of a man who considers things and is cautious before getting into a fight, and so knows what he can do

and where he can go. Manliness is the opposite not only of weakness and whining, but also of vociferousness and buffoonery, which separate fearlessness from its raison d'etre and therefore trades only on its vanity.

Havlíček's manliness is bound up with clarity, with a perception of the whole situation, with a vision of his own possibilities and goals, and also with an understanding of the intentions and snares of an adversary. Mere courage that is neither able to see clearly nor discern the situation in time and easily falls into traps, becomes a victim of its own credulity (blindness which is ideological in nature) and of foreign mystification. To discern and see through things takes time, but time is always a risk, a wager, something which plays with all possible permutations: winning, losing, and playing to the end. People play according to how they perceive time: someone who is counting on the Nazi occupation lasting forever can more easily become a collaborator than can somene who does not believe in the everlasting nature of the Third Reich. Collaboration is then only a bad calculation of time—of real time, which man as a mortal being has at his disposition.

In Havlíček's view, how does democracy deal with time? Time in his understanding of democracy is neither premature nor tardy, neither too early nor too late, but is always new, timeliness continually grasped and realized. That is why democracy is one's being, a way of life which one lives in the here and now. In order for one to actualize democracy as a real and truthful way (style) of life, one does not need to wait for this or that (great, revolutionary) historical event, because democracy as a part of one's own being is already a historical event. Therefore, a person is not dependent on future miracles, that would radically change the situation, nor is one a lackey of periodical misery. As a mortal and unique individual, a person has the complete opportunity here and now—with respects to him- or herself, friends and enemies, to the living and the dead, and to nature and to culture—to differentiate, with deeds and words, between good and evil, between truth and lies, the noble and the base, and between the beautiful and the ugly. In this way one can realize democracy as a part of one's own being. If one is a democrat then one is in no way a lackey: neither the lackey who with his fear and servility confirms overseers and governors in their functions; nor the lackey who by some chance has come to power and is forcing his servile existence on the entire world. If a person's concept of democracy is not a mere viewpoint, and thus only a subject of conversation, but is rather a way of living in which that person is and will always be while true to himself, then he is the living inception of a democratic world. This democratic world is one without masters and slaves, without executioners and victims, without arrogant overseers and humiliated victims.

Politics is for Havlíček a matter of manliness and character. One who does not possess these qualities, should not devote himself to politics, but rather, out of respect for the Czech nation, to another profession.

That manliness which is true to itself and does not pretend does not need to make up (for itself or for others) the feeble fiction that somewhere there is a Highest Accountant presiding over us who records all deeds and presents to each person their final tally on the day of the Last Judgment. Manliness does good of its own volition and does not need to be forced to do good. It does not need to be driven by a vision of some extraterrestrial, all-seeing eye, which observes and judges all human activity. Manliness is responsible only to itself and acts out of this respect for itself.

Only one who has respect for himself will not succumb to corruption and will have the courage to be honest. Honesty is the honor of the nonaristocratic (that is, of the people) and their pride is: modesty. It is only the person who lives with respect for himself and for his own conscience does not sink into baseness, but aims upward and is noble.

The noble mind is also tormented with fear, but is never a frightened soul. What kind of fear does nobleness have? Nobleness would cease to exist out of embarrassment if it were to proceed without honesty. Nobleness is disgusted, even physically, by any meanness or loathsomeness, and is disgusted by everything insolent.

However, whoever tries to save or to artificially keep nobleness alive by using the props and ready-made forms of the past, instead of creating from our own time and situation a new nobleness which corresponds to the current historical situation, is only fabricating a spasm, a ridiculous display of imitated gestures. Nobleness cannot be a mask behind which smallness, jealousy, and sarcasm hide. Artificial nobleness is only a deceit of avarice and sterility, while real nobleness gives, bestows, sparkles.

The noble soul does not need to have anyone or anything over it, for its own freedom and salvation, because with it every act is related to good. Within the soul itself a conversation is always beginning and never ending. This conversation has three participants, each of which are mutually dependent and mutually respectful of each other: prosecutor, defender, and judge. The noble soul can not endure to have any impersonal or superhuman power over itself, from which it must take orders and wait on judgments. This is because the noble soul knows that this superhuman agency is really only the mystification of a person who has sunk to the level of a mere creature. This being assumes (sibi arrogare, as was said in ancient Rome) that it has a right to everything, is always right, and has the power to do anything it wants.

Havlíček's nobleness consists of the unity of humor and moral rigor. Where humor and witty reason are missing, every attempt at nobleness produces only empty gestures. Humor and laughter support nobleness; without

them it would change into hollow pathos. Nobleness provides the foundation for liberating laughter, which would otherwise fall into triviality and unrestrained jesting. Democracy is the unity of manliness and humor: in this unity, democracy reaches a noble state. Such democracy has an understanding of pathos tempered with laughter and skepticism, and has an understanding of humor which is protected from joviality and personal pretentiousness by manliness.

We have to distinguish on the one hand between humor as a temporary frame of mind that alternates with other moods, between humor as a literary presentation of reality, and that essential, permanent humor which is part of a democratic existence in this world. This humor provides a way of objectively judging reality and of excluding any fanaticism or blindness. Humor is not a disconcerted and mealy joviality which, in moments of sentimental tides, does away with all essential distinctions within reality and necessarily immerses everything in a nondescript jelly or slop. Humor sinks into a familiarity which in a moment of sobriety would revert to its usual arrogance. Humor, through laughter and with laughter, is an acknowledgment of the dignity of mankind. Laughter does not humiliate man like mockery, nor does it take away nobleness as maliciousness does. Instead it bases itself on sociability among men, on a common acknowledgment of human mortality. In addition, it bases itself on human fallibility and imperfection, but also on a mutually acknowledged respect for the other as a distinctive and free being.

This personal democracy of Havlíček is based on and was conceived as a unified whole. It is also based on the mutual interaction of all three elements—manliness, clarity, and humor. During its further historical development this view of democracy was subjected to trials which disturbed the original unity. None of the three elements ceased to exist, however. They only lost their organic connection with the others, which in turn exposed this democracy to the dangers of onesidedness and degeneration. Humor without manliness—which includes solidity and responsibility—is lowered to vulgar joking and cowardly Švejkism. In the decisive moment, therefore humor could blind the vision of the people in such a way that they could replace political thought and behavior with thoughtless clowning. Manliness without clarity and sobriety, and without the tiring effort of thought and consideration, would sink to mere courage and boasting individualism. In the end, the analytical mind which does not have the support of friendly humor and real manliness will leave the public forum and survive in private life only as a museum exhibit.

(1969)

Translated by Marie Kallista

Chapter 21

THE EUROPEAN LEFT

The emergence of the so-called New Left in Western Europe testifies to the crisis and failure of the traditional Left. Conceived as a movement to revolutionize the world, the traditional Left, especially where it has come to power and had the opportunity to carry out its program, has had an ironic history. What was old, violent, hegemonic, stultifying, fanatic, and mendacious did not disappear from the world; rather, it has permeated this movement and made its home right there. The traditional Left is not, however, a sect or a meaningless group, but a movement. Inside of this movement rejuvenating and renascent forces appear periodically. They reach back to the movement's very origins, i.e., to its revolutionary and liberating purpose, and they renew and develop the movement itself.

The presence of both these rejuvenating forces inside the traditional Left and of the so-called New Left is a symptom of crisis rather than the promise of overcoming it. Judging the traditional Left not according to its original intent and mission, but according to its deeds and results, the New Left contents that the traditional Left has neither done away with hegemonic politics nor with political oppression, apathy, and narrowmindedness. Nevertheless, in my view this new and rebellious movement expropriated the name "New Left" too soon and rather unfairly. Problems whose importance these rebellious groups have not yet fully realized are overwhelming for them. Let us mention the use of violence as an example. Neither the actions nor the theoretical reflection of the New Left have dissipated the fears that violence will be transformed into a series of repeated and unending violent acts. Each will lead to and justify another violent act; violence will become a permanent and all-pervasive component of society. Consequently, from its very beginnings, even before this movement can fully develop, the irony of history threatens the New Left.

By this I want to say that the real New Left does not yet exist. Students'

:volts and renascent forces of the traditional Left may prepare the ground for genuine New Left, but this possibility has not yet materialized. The old pur-ıit of individual interest, exclusivity, and the lack of openness are harmful to rogressive currents and keep them isolated and dispersed. It thus happens that rogressive movements inside individual countries view other progressive ıovements in other countries—which do not use the same slogans or do not ave the same political demands—with mistrust and some degree of dog-ıatism.

The New Left cannot be born unless it is an alliance of workers and ıtellectuals. The intelligentsia deludes itself when it thinks that it can take ver the role of the working class. It fails to make a crucial distinction between ıose who initiate and inspire and a proper political movement. The ıtelligentsia can play the role of a group that initiates and arouses action, but ıis role cannot substitute for a proper people's movement. Otherwise history 'ill repeat itself, and good intentions will be transformed into their opposite.)nce again there would be an active subjectagainst the passive masses, once gain there would be educated teachers, preachers, and mentors on one side, nd passive pupils, believers, or those who need to be saved on the other.

Groups which revolt against the "establishment" in the West demand and ırough their actions express "nonconformity." However, they do not know if ıey are determined by that which they are revolting against, or by what is :ally new and liberating in their program. Nonconformity is not a program, it ; merely a derivative approach.

A genuine New Left, one that is deserving of the name and brings man's niversal liberation, rather than a limited and exclusive one, must take into ccount that revolution does not mean permanent reorganization, nor ermanent hysteria in society. At a certain level of development, the revolution ndergoes such a metamorphosis that it remains in existence and continues as ermanent reorganization. It manifests itself as a repetition of changes in xternal organizational forms which substitute themselves for and pretend to be enuine revolutionary activity.

The Left therefore has to criticize the myths and ideologies of the old vorld, but at the same time it must nurture within itself a critical spirit and an nprejudiced clearsightedness in order not to succumb to its *own* myths and deologies.

Plamen (*The Flame*—a literary monthly) (1969)

Translated by Zdenka Brodska and Mary Hrabik Samal

Chapter 22

THE BLINDNESS OF SHEER FAITH

It is often difficult to differentiate between what is normal and what is not because, at certain times, the latter poses as the former and is accepted as such. The normal is often denounced as extreme. Nevertheless, the difference between normality and its opposite is real. Generational disagreements are as normal a phenomenon as are differences of opinions in the evaluation of historical events, or the jettisoning of outdated views. What is not normal is the rejection of these normal phenomena and their classification as abnormality. In the generational dispute, it is absolutely normal that the "sons" take the offensive or question, and the "fathers" admonish them or justify themselves. "The lack of gratitude" and the insufficient "understanding" of the young is as normal as the "irritability" of the old. Even Solomon's judgment that both sides are right from their respective perspectives, and that both of their views are to a certain degree subjective, is normal.

Serious problems, however, ensue. What appears to be a generational dispute and asserts itself as the "sons'" one-sided reaction to their "fathers'" achievements may be merely one historical form in which history progresses. This progress is essentially independent of any generational conflicts. Thus, every generational division obscures the substantial difference between two historical viewpoints and two historical epochs: the main dividing line is drawn not between young and old, but between two radically different ways and notions of living, acting, thinking, musing, relating to each other, reflecting on truth, etc. It is, indeed, normal that confession, repentance, defense and criticism are part of this dispute. In this manner, an individual expresses his experience of his times, his ideas about them, and his memories which recall them. The "fathers'" experiences, their ideas and memories are pitted against those of the "sons.'"

Insofar as this dispute takes place in the area of experiences, memories, impressions, and personal sympathies and antipathies, historical or personal subjectivism obscures each viewpoint. What manifests itself as an argument becomes an inquiry, and as such becomes an object of historical criticism. What people knew about their own times and what they did not know, how well informed they were, what they believed in and whether their faith was well placed—all of these abstract factors will become concrete historical facts (*ergo* also arguments) under one condition: if they are expressed as inquiries which will reveal the nature of their historical context. In their recollections, most people do not even take this very first step. They argue by faith. Under what conditions, though, is faith the main link between man and reality? What is the relationship between faith on one hand and critical thought, the ability to see reality without bias and illusions, on the other? What connects the measure and quality of information with the content and meaning of historical action?

As long as one experience is set against another experience and one idea against another idea, all thinking about hitory remains in the realm of idealism. This inclination to idealism, this unwillingness or inability to view the history of one's own times in materialistic terms provides interesting food for thought. It shows that the materialistic explanation of past and contemporary history is neither self-evident nor natural. The materialistic explanation of history comes about in the intense struggle against all sorts of bias and prejudice.

If we understand the materialistic concept of history to be a critique of mystifications, superstitions and illusions, a confrontation between what people perceived as the meaning of their own activities in their historical context and the historical role they did in fact play, we have to ask what the relationship is between genuine knowledge and revolutionary, i.e., humanizing and liberating, activity? Does genuine knowledge impede effective activity; does it breed "Hamlet-like" indecision; is it in conflict with historical practice? Or, can we speak of revolutionary Marxism only when the course of truth and history—of humanism and effectiveness, of knowledge and praxis—is constantly renewed and becomes real. Is this approach possible only when praxis prepares the ground for genuine knowledge, when knowledge itself becomes a precondition of revolutionary praxis, and when the erosion of these connections has tragic consequences for both truth and history?

Literární noviny (*The Literary Newspaper*), June 13th, 1964

Translated by Zdenka Brodska and Mary Hrabik Samal

Chapter 23

INTELLECTUALS AND WORKERS

When speaking of the relationship between intellectuals and workers we often use the common Aesopian imagery which compares social classes to parts of the human body. For example, we refer metaphorically to the relationship between the working class and the intelligentsia as if it were that of the hands to the brain. We also speak of them in terms of unity of theory and praxis. These comparisons, however, are misleading and false. If the workers represent the hands and the intelligentsia the brains, then the workers are without brains and the intelligentsia is without hands. Their relationship, indeed, is based on a mutual fundamental insufficiency. Each side performs a function for the other: the intelligentsia thinks on behalf of the workers, and the workers work on behalf of the intelligentsia. Workers cannot think because the intelligentsia is their brain, and the intelligentsia cannot work because the workers are its hands. Both sides persist in espousing variations and remnants of this reactionary notion; some workers still think that the intelligentsia does not really work, and some of the intelligentsia hold that workers only represent a source of labor.

Mutual prejudice and bias also stand in the way of what really matters—the revolutionary political alliance of workers and intelligentsia. Among workers, the intellectual behaves either as a preacher or as a flatterer. Either he thinks that he must enlighten the ignorant masses and behaves as a teacher to his pupils, a professor to his students, a preacher to the faithful (it is always a relationship of an active individual to passive masses), or he takes a different tack and becomes the workers' "buddy," behaves with false joviality, slaps them on the back, jokes, calls them by their first name, and tries to be as servile as possible. Of course, part of this servility is bad-mouthing intellectuals.

A revolutionary political alliance of workers and intelligentsia should be based on reciprocal influence and dialogue. A natural characteristic among workers and intelligentsia, representing the two modern social strata, should be

the ability to take a critical approach to everything, including themselves. It is abnormal if the intelligentsia is forced into the position of having to persuade others of its own indispensability, usefulness, and importance; in this situation, it cannot play its normal critical role in society. The revolutionary alliance of workers and intelligentsia presuppose that both classes have brains and hands, that both work and think. This alliance should create something novel in politics, something which can be realized only as a consequence of mutual contact, dialogue, and influences. It does not mean though that one class will conform to the other or simulate the other; then there would be uniformity, not an alliance. If I were to have to express the purpose of this alliance succinctly I would use the words revolutionary wisdom or wise "revolutionariness."

A mutual political encounter and dialogue between the working class and the intelligentsia should give rise to an important componen of public and social life: political wisdom. Wisdom in politics excludes opportunism and slickness, as well as rashness and superficiality. Revolutionary wisdom and wise revolutionaries provide a guarantee against hysteria and demagoguery, against the ambition and conceit of individuals, against cowardice, overcautiousness, and the proverbial Czech false and uninspired joviality.

Orientace (*Orientation*—a literary periodical) No. 5 (1968)

Translated by Zdenka Brodska and Mary Hrabik Samal

Chapter 24

A WORD OF CAUTION ON WORKERS' COUNCILS

The glib explanations usually offered for the errors and faulty opinions of the past, of the so called pre-January period,[1] are that people were either seduced or forced into having these views. Who, however, is forcing and seducing people today? This question arises quite naturally in connection with the problem of the workers' councils. The press often writes about them, and some politicians—as well as the government—favor their establishment. This very important matter, i.e., the workers' councils through which workers are to participate in factory management, is suffering from a lack of forethought—our country's well-known and symptomatic disease. I would like to know who will be blamed for all the problems and shortcomings if the workers' councils are instituted, but after a while it becomes clear that they are not, as they are sometimes viewed today, a panacea for all economic ills? Who will be blamed when it becomes apparent that they are not the instrument by which a huge majority of workers participate in factory management, but just one of its uninfluential cogs or a group of persons whose main interest lies in making and distributing of a profit rather than in the management of the plant? Will the promoters of the workers' councils then discover something that they should have already known today?

It is rightly stressed that democracy demands responsibility, but it is also necessary to bear responsibility for one's opinions. Those who make public their views and strive for their implementation should also make sure that their opinions have been well thought out in advance and deal with all possible objections and eventualities. Let us put it this way: we are constantly flooded with half-baked notions and half-truths, which if acted upon usually result in disappointments, difficulties, and deformations. No one, however, asks what responsibility is born by the initiators of these ideas who have not thought about them sufficiently, deeply, or critically enough.

Before any workers' councils are established, the general public should be

well informed about them. A public debate on their purview and limitations would be useful. Such discussion should especially clarify the following issues. First: are the workers' councils really an example of direct democracy? If we do not want to complicate the matter and lead this discussion astray, wee should stick to the traditional meaning of the concept of direct democracy. It means that the holder of the franchise exercises it without any intermediary. The workers' councils, however, are based on the principle of delegation and election: the workers elect their representatives to the councils. This is indirect, not direct, democracy. Second: do the proponents of workers' councils realize the danger in establishing from above, by government decree? Do they know that these councils have yet to become the workers' concern? These councils do not reflect a grass-roots people's movement; their origin vitiates their mission. We can only hope that after their establishment the workers' councils will become bodies for active participation. There is not much interest and enthusiasm for these councils among workers today, perhaps because no one has explained the matter clearly and adequately to them. Third: do the proponents know that the workers' councils may degenerate and become merely formal institutions? Have they taken this danger into account? Have they analyzed the experience of other countries, be that of pluralistic democracy, and thus create the impression that workers' councils and political democracy are not connected? According to them, we can advocate either the councils or democracy but not both. It would behoove us to analyze the structure and system of an effective and working socialist democracy, so that we can responsibly say whether a socialist democracy can exist without political democracy or workers' councils.

In conclusion, let me say that we support workers' councils. We want, however, to demonstrate that our recommendation must be thoroughly well conceived and thought out beforehand.

Plamen (*The Flame*—a literary monthly), August 1968

Translated by Zdenka Brodska and Mary Hrabik Samal

Chapter 25

THE ONLY CHANCE— AN ALLIANCE WITH THE PEOPLE

(Speech given at a session of the Central Committee of the Czech Communist party in November 1968)

Our actions are fatefully inconsistent. We are the political body of the working class but, in our discussions, we seldom take into account the opinion and the interests of our workers. We respect neither their expectations nor their demands. Our discussion often resembles a session of a closed sect which is absorbed only in its own antagonisms, skirmishes over prestige, and the heedless struggles of individuals. We are forgetting about the existence of the working class, of cooperative farmers, of the intelligentsia, and of youth—all those without whom our political effort becomes senseless. It looks as if the voices of workers and communists from Vysočany and Kladno, from the East Slovakian ironworks, or from Ostrava cannot enter this hall. It looks as if we do not know that our workers are demanding in hundreds of resolutions a revival of our post-January [1968] reform policy. We are the political body of the party which professes to be Marxist and Leninist. However, there are only limited attempts here to use a Marxist analysis of active historical forces, class relations, social configurations, and power interests. Such an analysis could help us to understand and clear up the role of particular political groups and parties, tendencies and individual characteristics. Instead, we are witnesses to a situation—like that of the fifties—where the causes and driving forces of current historical events are sought in intrigues, and in the actions of foreign intelligence agencies and of mysterious domestic and foreign directors.

We are the supreme political body, which our workers and citizens expect to be a center of advanced political analysis and a model of penetrating and deep political thinking. Our workers would be greatly disillusioned, however,

if they were to hear some parts of our discussion, where analysis of the current situation and clarification of our recent past is replaced by clichés and underhand stories about intrigues or indiscretions. The post-January development is described rather schematically—the positive qualities on one side and the negative ones on the other side. This scheme gives rise to the view that the main political forces—or even the only ones—in the Czechoslovak development after January 1968 were the extreme political groups standing either in the very far-right or the very far-left wings of our political spectrum.

It is no wonder, then, that in this view, the basic nature and the meaning of the post-January development are lost. The impression is created that the whole period can be characterized as a chain of isolated actions, mistakes, pressures, and a few partial achievements; and that the history of these days took place above all in the meetings of the Communist party Central Committee. It seems to me that the major drawback of such an approach is that it neglects essentials in favor of minor deviations, pressures, and extremes; it does not see the forest for the trees. We are forgetting about the most important and leading political power—the workin class and the Communist party. The history of Czechoslovakia after January 1968 is, above all, the history of the working class, of its political revival, of its growing self-consciousness, and of its constitution as a *political* subject. It is at the same time a history of the complicated formation of an alliance between the working class and the agricultural workers, intelligentsia, and the youth.

The historical analysis of the political development in Czechoslovakia after January 1968 will have to reveal a new fundamental direction in our modern history behind the tangle of extremes and mistakes, vicissitudes and illusions, mistakes and obscurities. What is the basis of our post-January development? What do we need to keep? What must be further developed? *The basis of this development is the transformation of the working class itself.* We must not forget that the working class was politically passive during the former regime, a regime which created and confirmed this passivity as a condition of its existence. Formalism, bureaucracy, directive methods of management, etc.—all of these are simultaneously the result of and the precondition for the political passivity of workers. We can say that, in the social and political spheres, our post-January history can be described as a period of the revolutionary and socialistic transformation of *the working class*, which has become a real political subject. This transformation enabled it to revive and intensify an alliance with the agricultural workers, intelligentsia, and the youth.

The working class, which used to be a passive and a politically indifferent group manipulated by bureaucratic methods, has gradually become an active, leading political force after January 1968. This is a force which is the collective owner of the nationalized enterprises, that wants not only to work in them, but to manage them as well. It also wants to *direct and manage* the whole society in a new way. On the one hand the Communist party is the instrument of

this transformation of the working class, and on the other hand, due to this transformation, the party is changing the forms of its work and its methods of political leadership. Consequently, the moments of crisis which occurred in our party happened because many of its officials had become accustomed to a certain style of work and management based on the manipulation of the workers and the people. These officials thought that people should be provided only with limited amounts of information distributed from above, and they wanted the people to act in conformance with predetermined schematic patterns of thinking and behavior.

However, the 1968 development in Czechoslovakia has demonstrated to the working class that it cannot fulfill its leading political role in socialism without freedom of speech and information. Consequently, this same working class has shown that it is capable of interpreting information on its own. This qualitative shift in the political development of the Czechoslovak working class must also bring corresponding qualitative changes in the working style of our party.

The conflict between the working class and the intelligentsia was a spurious one, mostly provoked artificially by the former regime. The purpose of this provocation was not only to instigate conflict between one social group and another, but was at the same time an assault against the wisdom, the critical thinking, and—in short—against the intellect of the working class itself. This artificial and spurious conflict was directed above all against the workers. It was not by mere chance that the drive against the intelligentsia—i.e., against the intellect and wisdom—was at the same time reviving the most diverse retrograde attitudes, such as antisemitism, mass psychosis, etc. A dark alliance of superstitions, prejudices, and resentments was organized simultaneously, both in secret and overtly, against a possible alliance between intelligentsia and workers and against wisdom.

In the past various ruling and exploitative classes brought *their own* features into politics, and promoted them to the status of fundamental political virtues. To be involved in politics meant to be guileful, artful, and bullying, etc. What has the working class, and working people generally, brought to politics that is new? The revolutionary political alliance of workers, agriculture workers, youth, and intelligentsia should be based on mutual dialogue. Each group should bring something unique and special into their relations with each other. This alliance as a whole creates something new in politics, something that is the historical contribution of the working people to politics. An important component of social and political life—*revolutionary wisdom*—is and should be created in the mutual political contact and dialogue between the industrial and agricultural workers, youth, and intelligentsia. This revolutionary wisdom should become the fundamental quality brought to politics by the working class. It should also do away with the typical features of the politics of the past. Revolutionary wisdom in politics excludes opportunism

and cunning, as well as haste and superficiality. Revolutionary wisdom and wise revolution should become a guarantee against hysteria and demagogy, against the ambitions and the vanity of individuals, against cowardice, excessive caution, naivete, and illusions.

The development in Czechoslovakia after January 1968 represents a process of revival that is attempting to remove social deformations and to create a socialism based on the ideas of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. It is known that for Marx and Engels socialism meant *three* revolutions and *three* kinds of liberations. First is the class and social liberation that liquidates the exploitation of man by man and which provides a base for socialist society. Second, it represents a political and moral liberation which does away with social divisions between the ruling and the ruled, the privileged and those who have no rights, full and second-class citizens. It creates a socialist society whose citizens all have full and equal rights. The third type is represented by the liberation of nations, after which there should be no ruling and controlled nations, no privileged and second-rate nations, no superpower nations and no "small" ones. This liberation makes possible new relations among nations, ones based on equality, mutual respect, and sovereignty.

It is evidently a misunderstanding if sovereignty is described as the antitheses of socialistic internationalism, or if a just defense of national and state sovereignty is denounced as nationalism.[1] Socialism as the total liberation of man includes the abolition of exploitation, of political suppression, and of political privilege. It does not allow the supremacy of one nation over another, nor the restriction of the sovereign rights of one state by another. Every political leadership must be based on real political forces. The current real political force consists of the politically mature and active working class whose attitudes and opinions are reflected in the previously mentioned resolutions. A prerequisite for any further positive development of the alliance between the party and the nation is that the Central Committee, especially the political leadership, must gain the support of the working class which represents the heart and the leading power of the socialist unity of the working people. The leadership must also demonstrate by concrete actions its will to continue the politics of the period following January 1968. If this happens, then the necessary conditions will be present for the unity of party and people to be maintained and to further develop. In that event that the Central Committee would, for any reason, ignore this real force it would risk losing the next day all real support, and all of the current proclamations of loyalty to the post-January development would become empty words. A fatal splitting between the party—or, more precisely, the party leaders—on one side, and the working class and the people on the other side would then become a real possibility. The party leadership would then lose its real revolutionary and socialist support, and would fall into a social vacuum and isolation. At that moment, a shadow would spread all

over our country—an ominous shadow announcing a regime quite similar to that which ruled our country before January 1968.

(November 1968)

Translated by Marie Kallista

NOTES

(Editor's notes are distinguished from author's notes by asterisk. Double asterisk [**] refers to editorial notes in the Serbo-Croatian edition).

Introduction [All Editor's Notes]

1. The best single work on the "Prague Spring" is H. Gordon Skilling's book, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

2. All of the biographical information here is taken from Lubomir Sochor's entry on Kosík in the *Biographical Dictionary of Neo-Marxism*, edited by Robert A. Gorman (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), pp. 240–42.

3. Vladimir V. Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 29.

4. Ibid., p. 28.

5. Tad Szulc, *Czechoslovakia Since World War II* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap; paperback edition published by arrangement with Viking Press, 1972), p. 155.

6. Ibid., p. 180.

7. Ibid., p. 183. See discussion on p. 33 of this volume of the relationship between the "Czech Question" and the "Slovak Question," part of the discussion of the "Crisis of the Nation" in the essay "Our Present Crisis."

8. Ibid., p. 184.

9. A. Oxley et al., *Czechoslovakia: The Party and the People* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1973), p. xiii.

10. *Literární noviny* (newspaper) (Prague), April 21, November 17, December 1, December 29 (1956); March 9 and March 16 (1957); January 4 (1958).

11. Kusin, p. 37.

12. J. M. Bocheński, "The Great Split," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 8,1 (March 1968).

13. Karel Kosík, *Dialektika konkrétního* (Prague: ČSAV, 1966), p. 17.

14. Oxley, p. 48.

15. Ibid., p. 112.

16. Ibid., p. 162.

17. See the debate on "The Role of the Party" in G. Golan, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 163–176.

18. "False consciousness" is a concept from Marx that refers to a situation in which people's beliefs serve to create a false picture of reality, one that simultaneously hides the true nature of reality and justifies the false picture they have of it.

19. A. J. Liehm, *The Politics of Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 397.

20. Ibid., p. 398.

21. *The Czech Question* (Česká otázka) is a book written by Czechoslovakia's first president, T. G. Masaryk, in which he set out his ideas on the meaning of Czech political identity. This book served as the focus for an ongoing national debate on the character of the Czechoslovak Republic.

22. Oxley, p. 110.

23. Karel Kosík, *Dijalektika krize* (Beograd: NIP Mladost, 1983), p. 124; (p. 111 in this volume).

24. Ibid., p. 58; (p. 59 in this volume).

25. Ibid., p. 48; (p. 40 in this volume). "Objectivization" here refers to the way in which this technical rationality treats reality solely as consisting of objects to be manipulated.

26. Ibid., p. 124; (p. 111 in this volume).

27. František Palacký was a Czech historian at the beginning of the nineteenth century who played an important role in the "Czech National Revival" movement that helped to define a modern Czech national identity.

28. Ibid., p. 125; (p. 111–112 in this volume).

29. Ibid., p. 34; (p. 32 in this volume).

30. Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1972).

31. Karel Kosík, *Století Markety Samsové* (Prague: Český Spisovatel, 1993).

Chapter 1

1. *This essay refers to the historical trial of Jan Hus (1371–1415) and the Council of Constance. (Hus was a Bohemian theologian who, following John Wycliffe, worked toward greater lay participation in religious life and greater use of the vernacular. He was burned at the stake for heresy, and has become a Czech national hero.)

Chapter 2

1. *This was the title given to a series of articles appearing in *Literární Listy* in 1968 describing the nature of the Czechoslovak political crisis.

2. *"Transmission Belts" referred to the way in which directives were handed down within the party from the top to be implemented. All social organizations, not just the party, were expected to "transmit" these directives

and carry them out; this was their sole purpose in life, and the "transmission" was always one-way, from top to bottom.

3. *See discussion on p. 8 in Introduction of "Vanguardism."

4. *Tomáš Masáryk (1850–1937) was the founder of the Czechoslovak Republic after World War I, but also a man of philosophical leanings. He wrote a small book called *Česká otázka* (The Czech Question), in which he explored the nature of Czech political identity. Rosa Luxemburg (1870–1919) was a major Marxist thinker, active in the Polish and German Social-Democratic movements. Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) was an Italian Communist thinker who developed an early philosophy of "praxis" similar to Kosík's.

5. *George (György) Lukács (1885–1971) was one of the foremost Marxist thinkers of the twentieth century. Born in Hungary, he was forced to leave there in 1919 after the failure of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, in which he was Minister of Culture. Lukács is best known for his work, *History and Class Consciousness* (1973; originally published as *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*), in which he rediscovered the Hegelian roots of Marxism, and the role of the subject in history (as opposed to the historical determinism then reigning).

6. *"Apparat" is the term used to denote the Communist party "apparatus" (bureaucracy/machine).

7. *This theme is explored in depth by the Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski in his book *Świadomość religijna i więź kościelna* (*Religious Consciousness and Ecclesiastical Ties*), published in French as *Cretiens sans èglise*. One chapter (Ch. 3) of that appeared in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* in 1990, translated by the editor of the present volume as "Dutch Seventeenth-Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion: The Mennonite, Collegiant and Spinozan Connections." For an extended discussion of Kołakowski's book and its contemporary significance, see Rubem Cesar Fernandes's 1976 dissertation "The Antinomies of Freedom (On the Warsaw Circle of Intellectual History)," pp. 252–94 (Columbia University).

8. *See notes 6 and *** in Introdction, pp. 12 and 14, for discussion of the "Czech Question."

9. *See note **** on p. 14 in Introduction on Palacký; also see Chapter 9, note 1, on Havlíček.

10. *Jan Amos Komenský [Comenius] (1592–1670) was a Czech writer who was instrumental in continuing a Czech literature, albeit in exile, and was famous the world over for his advance ideas on education.

11. *Karel Čapek was a well-known Czech writer of the early twentieth century.

12. **At issue here is the mammoth monument to Stalin in Prague, completed for the XXth Congress of the CPSU and destroyed when the Congress was over.

13. **Kosík has in mind the fate of Stalin's mummy in Lenin's mausoleum; the ashes of communist officials sprinkled along the road belonged to the victims of the trial of Slanský and others in Prague (See discussion of the Slanský trials on p. 3 in Introduction).

14. *Enlightenment philosopher (1743–1794) who saw "progress" as the indefinite perfectibility of mankind.

15. *For a comparable discussion, see Zygmunt Bauman (former Polish sociologist who was also interested in a humanist Marxism), *Socialism: The Active Utopia.* See also this editor's work, *Varieties of Marxist Humanism: Philosophical Revisionism in Postwar Eastern Europe* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992).

Sections 7 and 8 of "Our Present Crisis" that follow here were not in the earlier published versions, but were added for this edition from Kosík's manuscript, and translated from the Czech by James Satterwhite.

Chapter 3

1. *Cf. *Dialectics of the Concrete*, p. 30. "Pseudoconcrete" refers to the "fictitious objectivity of a phenomenon," whereby its real, human meaning in a social-historical context is lost from view, and the (social) phenomenon takes on a life of its own, seemingly independent of its human significance.

2. *Socialization of the means of production" means either state control or social control (not necessarily the same thing) of at least key sectors of the economy.

3 *A phenomenon which occurred during the "Prague Spring" reform movement.

Chapter 4

1. **This article was published in its entirety in Italian in the journal of the Italian Communist party, *Critica Marxista* 3, 1964. The translation into the Serbo-Croatian which was used as a basis for the present edition was consequently done primarily from this Italian edition, although a version was also consulted. Also a portion of the article appeared in Czech in *Plamen* 9, 1964; that version was also used as a basis for part of the Serbo-Croatian translation. The place where the Czech version begins is indicated in the essay by an editorial note.

2. *Georgi Plekhanov (1856–1918) was the founder of the Russian Social Democratic party, and its primary theoritician before Lenin, on whom his writing had an enormous influence. Plekhanov is known for his attempts to explore a Marxist aesthetics, especially the question of the genesis of art forms and their relationship with phases of historical development.

3. *Following especially from Engels's interpretation of Marx, influenced by the Darwinism so prevalent in the nineteenth century, the socialists of the latter part of the century tended to stress "the laws of history" ("historical materialism" understood in a very deterministic fashion, where historical economic conditions determined human activity well-nigh absolutely). The "antinomy" referred to here is between this deterministic understanding of history and that which stresses the creative role of humans in shaping history, and thus their social reality. (See Chapter 4, note 8, below.) "Economic factor" refers to "isolated products of human objective or spiritual praxis to be 'agents' of social development, though in reality the only agent of social movement is man himself, in the process of producing and reproducing his social life." (*Dialectics of the Concrete*, p. 63.)

4. *Making history into a "thing," standing over against human actions and independent of them.

5. *Cf. Kosík, *Dialectics of the Concrete*, p. 51. "Homo economicus is man as a component of a system, as a functioning element of a system, who as such must be equipped with essential features indispensable for running the system."

6. *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3 (New York: International Pubs. Co., 1975), p. 310.

7. *The Czech version published in *Plamen* as *"Antinomie morálky"* begins with this paragraph and continues to the end of the article.

8. **R. Girard, *Mensonge romantique et verité romanesque* (Paris, 1961).

9. *Cf. *Dialectics of the Concrete*, pp. 7, 137. "Praxis is the exposure of the mystery of man . . . as a being that forms the (socio-human) reality and therefore also grasps and interprets it. (p. 137) "Revolutionary praxis" means that man can change sociohuman reality in a revolutionary way . . . because he forms this reality himself. (p. 7) Praxis is a central concept for Kosík, and indeed for all Marxist humanists.

Chapter 5

1. *Hašek—author of the Czech literary classic, *The Good Soldier Švejk* (first published in 1921), a novel about the bumbling soldier Švejk (Schweik) that has been read variously as an expression of the Czech character of passive resistance and as a superb statement of the "ugliness" and "futility" of war (quotes in English in this article, and some in the following article, are taken from Cecil Parrott's translation published by Thomas Crowell Co., New York, 1974). Emphasis and brackets [] are the translator's.

2. Lada's idyllization of Švejk is not the only example where the representation in an illustration distorts the literary model. In fact, this kind of idealization and idyllization has a strong tradition in Czech culture. One need only cite the example of Myslbek's statue of the poet Mácha [see Chapter 12, note 3, below—ed.] on Petřína hill in Prague, which has absolutely nothing to do with the work of genius of that Czech poet, and which for decades has given the public a false impression of Mácha.

3. Facelessness and anonymity appear in countless forms. W. Emrich characterizes the high official Klamm in *The Castle* as a "force controlling all human relationships." It is indeed remarkable that an important fact, obvious to Czech readers, has escaped Western critics: that Kafka's bureaucrat Klamm is intrinsically tied to the Czech word "klam," meaning enigma, ambiguity, delusion, and deception.

4. *Ferdinand—Austrian archduke whose assassination at Sarajevo (Bosnia, Yugoslavia) in 1914 triggered World War One.

Chapter 6

1. "Normalization" refers to the process of unraveling the reform movement after the Prague Spring was forcibly ended by the Soviet/Warsaw Pact invasion.

2. *Rosa Luxemburg, *Die Russische Revolution. Eine kritische Würdiging*, Aus dem Nachlass hrsg. und eingel. Berlin: Von Paul Levi, 1932 [English translation, *The Russian Revolution, & Leninism or Marxism* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1961, pbk. ed.; reprint, Ann Arbor Series for the Study of Communism and Marxism, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981).

Chapter 7

1. *Josef Frič was a radical Czech democrat active in the 1848 Prague uprising; Zdeněk Nejedly was a Marxist historian of the interwar period; Kurt Konrad was an interwar Czech philosopher; Josef Pekář was an interwar Czech historian.

Chapter 8

1. *Laco Novomeský (b. 1904 in Budapest) is a Slovak poet. Milan Kundera (b. 1929) is one of the best-known Czech writers of the modern period. He gave one of the main speeches at the Fourth Writer's Conference in 1967. Sommer is a lesser-known writer of that period. Ivan Vyskočil (b. 1929) is a Czech writer. Dominik Tatarka (b. 1913) is a Slovak novelist.

Chapter 9

1. *Karel Havlíček was a Czech journalist of the mid-1800s who as editor of the newspaper *Pražké Noviny* (Prague News) from 1846 worked to spread liberal ideas, and helped in the formation of a Czech political identity.

Chapter 10

1. *The move for autonomy for Slavic peoples within the context of the Habsburg Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 11

1. *Originally published in the journal *Tvář* ("Face" no. 2, 1969. Havel is the playwright and Charter 77 signer who became president of Czechoslovakia in 1990.

2. *Movement for greater autonomy for the Czech lands within the Habsburg empire; it was part of the revolutionary movements across Europe in those years, associated particularly with liberal political philosophy.

Chapter 12

1 *Jan Neruda (1834–91) was a Czech writer, and a leader of a younger generation of Czech writers who were against traditional patriotic norms in Czech literature. The "Young Czechs" were a faction in Czech politics (especially in Bohemia) from 1861 onward which was liberal and nationalistic, and which thus was against cooperation with the traditional Bohemian (German) aristocracy in the context of the Vienna parliament.

2. *Julius Fučík was a Czech Communist writer of the 1920s and 1930s whose interpretation of Švejk has become the standard orthodox Marxist-Leninist interpretation.

3. *Karel Hynek Mácha—Czech Romantic writer (1810–36) who created a model of a new Czech poetic language in his poem "Maj" (May).

Chapter 13

1. *Friedrich von Schiller (b. 1759) was a German writer of the eighteenth century, known for his drama, poetry and writings on literary theory and aesthetics. Friedrich Hölderlin (b. 1770) was a German lyric poet, a contemporary of Schiller's. Friedrich Schelling (b. 1775) was one of the most important German philosophers of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries, belonging to the tradition of German Idealism and Romantic philosophy.

2. Wenn wir uns die Geschichte als ein Schauspiel denken, in welchem jeder, der daran Theil hat, ganz frei und nach Gutdünken seine Rolle spielt, so lässt sich eine vernünftige Entwicklung dieses verworrenen Spiels nur dadurch denken, dass es Ein Geist ist, der in allen dichtet, und dass der Dichter, dessen blosse Bruchstücke (disjecti membra poëtae) die einzelnen Schauspieler sind, den objektiven Erfolg des Ganzen mit dem freien Spiel aller einzelnen schon zum voraus so in Harmonie gesetzt hat, dass am Ende wirchlich etwas Vernünftiges herauskommen muss. Wäre nun aber der Dichter unabhängig von seinem Drama, so wären wir nur die Schauspieler, die ausführen, was er gedichtet hat. Ist er nicht unabhängig von uns, sondern offenbart und enthüllt er sich nur successiv durch das Spiel unserer Freiheit selbst, so dass ohne diese Freiheit auch er selbst nicht wäre, so sind wir Mitdichter des Ganzen, und

Selbsterfinder der besonderen Rolle, die wir spielen." F. Schelling, *System des transcendentalen Idealismus*, in *Schellings Werke*, ed. Manfred Schröter (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1927; unaltered reprint, München: Münchener Jubiläumsdruckes', 1958), 2:602 (page references are the same in both editions). Translation in text taken from F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath, with an Introduction by Michael Vater (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 210. This translation replaces the one in the version of the article printed in *Marx and the Western World*.

3. MEW, IV, 135; cf. *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Moscow.

4. In this sense, the historical position of the individual is interpreted among others by Dilthey, *Ges. Schriften*, vol. VII, p. 135.

5. "Processus objectif, régi par des lois connaissables que nous appellons l'Histoire," G. Lukács, *Existentialisme ou Marxisme*, Paris, 1948, p. 150.

6. "Die Entwicklung der reichen Individualität, die ebenso allseitig in ihrer Produktion als Konsumtion ist ind deren Arbeit daher auch nicht mehr als Arbeit, sondern als volle Entwicklung der Tätigkeit selbst erscheint, in der die Naturnotwendigkeit in ihrer unmittelbaren Form verschwunden ist . . . die im universellen Austausch erzeugte Universalität der Bednürfnisse, Fähigkeiten, Genüsse, Produktivkräfte etc. der Individuen . . . Die freie Entwicklung der Individualitäten . . . und die Reduktion der notwendigen Arbeit der Gesellschaft zu einem Minimum, der dann die künstlerische, wissenschaftliche etc. Ausbildung der Individuen durch die für sie alle freigewordne Zeit und geschaffnen Mittel entspricht. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Berlin, 1953, pp. 231, 387, 593. The translation in the text is taken from Martin Nicolaus' translation, published by Penguin Books, 1973, pp. 325, 488, 706. It represents an alteration of the translation as it appeared in the verion of the paper found in N. Lobkowicz, *Marx and the Western World* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Univ. Press, 1967).

Chapter 15

1. *For a similar discussion see the section on "Reason and Rationality" in Kosík's *Dialectics of the Concrete*.

Chapter 16

1. *Karel Sabina was a nineteenth-century Czech writer, journalist and politician, known as a radical democrat. One of his most famous prose works was *Oživené hroby* [*Revived Graves*], written in 1870. Alexandr Herzen (b. 1812) was a Russian writer and social philosopher, best known for his Populism. Influenced at first by Schelling and the French social philosopher Saint-Simon, he was later influenced by Proudhon, a French anarchist Socialist. Nikolai Chernyshevsky (b. 1828) was a Russian radical journalist, a contemporary of Herzen's, best known for his novel *Shto Delat?* (1863; translated into English as *What is to Be Done?* in 1866), which had an enormous impact among radical circles in its time.

Chapter 17

1. *František Halas (1901–1949) was a poet and translator, one of the best interwar poets of Czechoslovakia; among his poems was "Torzo nadeje."

2. *Emanuel Arnold (1800–1869) was a publisher and journalist, and one of the leaders of the Czech Radical Democrats. He published a radical newspaper, *Občánské noviny*, in 1848–49, and was otherwise active in the events of that year.

3. Franz Grillparzer observes of the author of this statement, Count Leo Thun, that: "er hat die tschechische Nazionalität in Schutz genommen, welche Nazionalität nur den Fehler hat, dass sie keine ist, so wie die Czechen keine Nazion sind, sondern nur ein Volksstamm, und ihre Sprache nichts mehr als ein Dialekt. (*Werke*, Wien, 1925, Bd. 16.) [Grillparzer observes of Thun that "he defended the Czech nationality, which nationality only entails the fallacy that it isn't one, just as the Czechs are not a nation but rather an ethnic group, and as its language is a mere dialect." See note 7, this chapter—ed.]

4. *The concept of "concrete totality" is a central concept in Kosík's *Dialectics of the Concrete*.

5. *Max Weber und die Soziologie heute*, p. 133.

6. Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, 1959, p. 14.

7. *Franz Grillparzer (1791–1872). Austrian playwright who addressed the social and moral problems of his day in his dramas, and who was critical of

the Habsburg policies toward subject nations. Author of *King Ottokar.* [See n. 3, this chapter—ed.]

8. Lebhaftes Bravo!; Sitzung des Herrenhauses des Reichstages am 27. August 1861. [Sitting of the upper house of the Reichstag]

9. *Libuše: She is held to be the founder of the original Czech state and of the Přemysl dynasty. She is part of Czech legend, which found expression in the opera by the same name written by the well-known Czech composer, Beřich Smetana. Jan Žižka (c. 1360–1424) was a Hussite general from southern Bohemia. King Ottokar: *König Ottokars Glück und Ende* [The Fame and Fall of King Ottokar]—a play by Franz Grillparzer critical of Austrian policies.

10. See *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen,* 1810.

11. Rosenstock-Huessy: *Die europäischen Revolutionen,* 1931, p. 425; Ernst Behler, "Schlegel und Hegel," in *Hegel Studien,* Bd. 2, 1963, p. 232.

12. See the journal *Slovan,* 20 and 27 September 1871.

13. *"Perun" was the name of the pagan Slavic god of thunder and lightening.

14. *"Anschluss" [annexation] refers to the German annexation of Austria in 1938; "The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia" was the German-controlled state of Bohemia and Moravia during WWII; "The Slovak State" was the name used for Slovakia after it declared [nominal] independence in 1939; "General Gouvernement" refers to the area of Poland under German rule, but not annexed to Germany during WWII.

15. H. Knittmermeyer, *Das Gesetz des Sittlichen, Blätter.* f.d. Phil., Bd. 14, 1940, p.244.

16. H. Freyer, *Der Staat,* 1926, p. 108.

17. Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein,* 1923, pp. 196, 222; *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971, translated by Rodney Livingstone), pp. 185, 203.

18. Emil Utitz, *Psychologie života v terezínském koncentračním táboře* [The Psychology of Life in the Concentration Camp Thieresenstadt], 1947.

19. František Halas, *Torso nadeje* [The Torso of Hope], Prague, 1938.

Chapter 18

1. *"2000 Words to Workers, Farmers, Scientists, Artists, and Everyone," [*Literární listy*, June 27, 1968] was the name of the manifesto published by the writer Ludvík Vaculík in June 1968, calling for the reform to move ahead faster under pressure from below. General Kodaj was Slovak, and commander of Czechoslovak forces in Eastern Slovakia. For the text of his statement, see the Slovak newspaper *Svobodné Slovo* (Bratislava), June 28, 1968. A good discussion of these events is found in H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 272–279.

Chapter 19

1. *"Tyrolské elegie" [Tyrol Elegies] (1852) was a satire written by the Czech journalist, politician and Awakener, Karel Borovsky Havlíček (b. 1821) during his exile in Brixen, Austria [see Chapter 9, note 1, above]. "Oživené hroby" [Revived Graves] (1870) was written by Karel Sabina [see Chapter 16, note 1, above].

2. *Andrey Vyshinsky was the chief prosecutor for Stalin's Great Purge trials in the 1930s. Nikolai Bukharin (b. 1888) was an early member of the Bolshevik party, and a leader at the time of the Revolution—member of the Politburo and Central Committee, editor of *Pravda*, head of the Comintern (Communist International) from 1926–28, and head of the party along with Stalin until the late 1920s. He is best known for his economic theories, which provided the basis for NEP (New Economic Policy) in the 1920s and which attracted a lot of attention more recently in the Soviet Union in the search for a non-Stalinist model of Socialism.

3. *Examples of these are given by Kosík in the Czech text, but they do not lend themselves well to translation: strážník—policajt, darebák—gauner, továrník—fabrikant, slečna—frajle, deštník—paraple.

Chapter 20

1. *The *Moderna* movement was a Czech literary movement at the end of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 24

1. *The period before Dubček and his team of reformers came to power.

Chapter 25

1. Footnote for those who read fast: "There is irony in these words."

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